THE BOY ALLIES AT LIÈGE

By Clair W. Hayes

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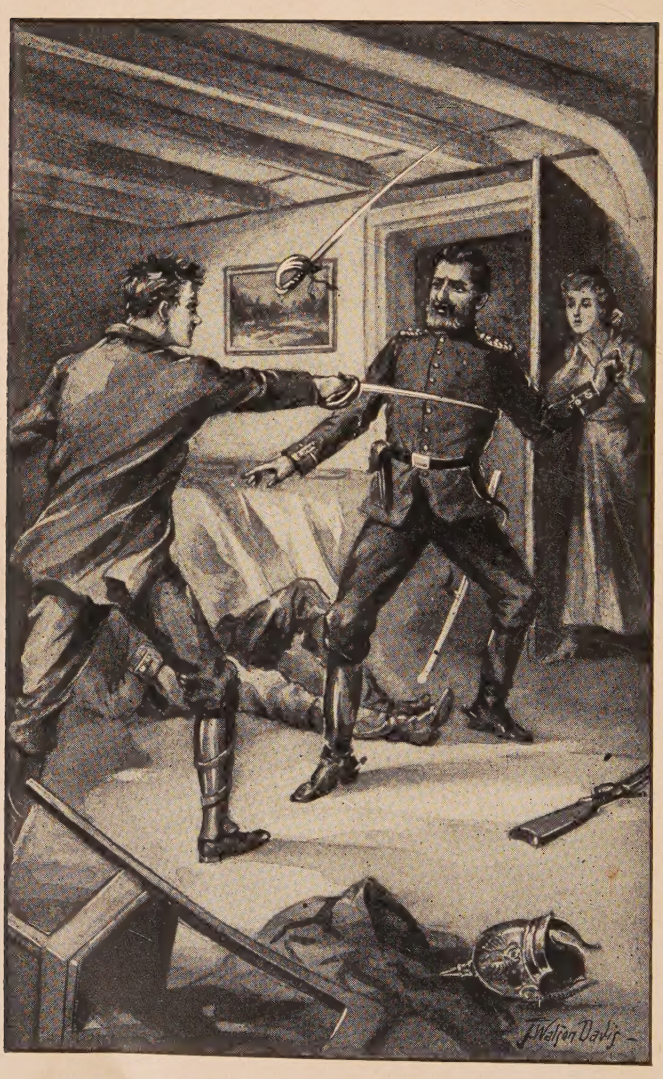

With a quick stroke he sent the general's sword flying from his grasp. Page 155.

"*The Boy Allies at Liège.*"

THE BOY ALLIES AT LIÈGE

OR

Through Lines of Steel

By CLAIR W. HAYES

AUTHOR OF

"The Boy Allies On the Firing Line"
"The Boy Allies With the Cossacks"
"The Boy Allies In the Trenches"

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THE BOY ALLIES AT LIÉGE

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CHAPTER I.

THE TWO COMRADES.

"WAR has been declared, mother!" shouted Hal, as, closely followed by his friend, Chester Crawford, he dashed into the great hotel in Berlin, where the three were stopping, and made his way through the crowd that thronged the lobby to his mother's side.

"Yes, mother, it's true," continued Hal, seeing the look of consternation on Mrs. Paine's face. "The Kaiser has declared war upon France!"

Mrs. Paine, who had risen to her feet at her son's entrance, put her hand upon the back of her chair to steady herself, and her face grew pale.

"Can it be?" she said slowly. "After all these years, can it be possible that millions of men will again fly at each other's throats? Is it possible that Europe will again be turned into a battlefield?"

Overcome by her feelings, Mrs. Paine sank slowly into her chair. Hal and Chester sprang to her side.

"It's all right, mother," cried Hal, dropping to

his knees and putting his arm about her. "We are in no danger. No one will harm an American. At this crisis a citizen of the United States will not be molested."

Mrs. Paine smiled faintly.

"It was not of that I was thinking, my son," she said. "Your words brought back to me the days gone by, and I pray that I shall not have to go through them again. Then, too, I was thinking of the mothers and wives whose hearts will be torn by the news you have just told me. But come," and Mrs. Paine shook off her memories, "tell me all about it."

"As you know, Mrs. Paine, spoke up Chester, who up to this time had remained silent, "Hal and I went to the American Embassy immediately after dinner to-night to learn, if possible, what difficulties we were likely to encounter in leaving Germany. Since the Kaiser's declaration of war against Russia all Americans have been preparing to get out of the country at the earliest possible moment. But now that war has been declared on France, we are likely to encounter many hardships."

"Is there any likelihood of our being detained?" asked Mrs. Paine in alarm. "What did the ambassador say?"

"While the ambassador anticipates no danger for foreigners, he advises that we leave the country immediately. He suggests that we take the early morning train across the Belgian frontier."

"Why go to Belgium?"

"All railroad lines leading into France have been seized by German soldiers. Passenger traffic has been cut off, mother," explained Hal. "All trains are being used for the movement of troops."

"Yes, Mrs. Paine," continued Chester, "we shall have to go through Belgium. Even now thousands of the Kaiser's best troops are marching upon the French frontier, and fighting is only a question of hours."

"Very well, then," returned Mrs. Paine. "We shall go in the morning. So I guess we would all better go upstairs and pack. Come along, boys."

While the packing is going on, it is a good time to describe the two American lads, who will play the most important parts in our story.

Hal Paine was a lad some seventeen years of age. Following his graduation from high school in a large Illinois city the previous June, his mother had announced her intention of taking him on a tour through Europe. Needless to say, Hal jumped at this chance to see something of the foreign coun-

tries in whose histories he had always been deeply interested. It was upon Hal's request that Mrs. Paine had invited his chum, Chester Crawford, to accompany them.

Chester was naturally eager to take the trip across the water, and, after some coaxing, in which Mrs. Paine's influence also was brought to bear, his parents finally agreed to their son's going so far away from home.

Hal's father was dead. A colonel of infantry, he was killed leading a charge at the battle of El Caney, in the Spanish-American war. Hal's grandfather died of a bayonet wound in the last days of the Civil War.

But, if Hal's father's family was a family of fighters, so was that of his mother. Her father, a Virginian, was killed at the head of his men while leading one of Pickett's regiments in the famous charge at Gettysburg. Three of her brothers also had been killed on the field of battle, and another had died in prison.

From her own mother Mrs. Paine had learned of the horrors of war. Before the war her father had been a wealthy man. After the war her mother was almost in poverty. While too young then to remember these things herself, Mrs. Paine knew what havoc had been wrought in the land of her

birth by the invasion of armed men, and it is not to be wondered at that, in view of the events narrated, she should view the coming struggle with anguish, despite the fact that her own country was not involved and that there was no reason why her loved ones should be called upon to take up arms.

Chester's father was a prominent and wealthy lumberman, and Chester, although nearly a year younger than Hal, had graduated in the same class with his comrade. The two families lived next door to each other, and the lads had always been the closest of chums.

For the last three years the boys had spent each summer vacation in one of the lumber camps owned by Chester's father, in the great Northwest. Always athletically inclined, the time thus spent among the rough lumbermen had given the boys new prowess. Day after day they spent in the woods, hunting big game, and both had become proficient in the use of firearms; while to their boxing skill—learned under a veteran of the prize-ring, who was employed by Chester's father in the town in which they lived—they added that dexterity which comes only with hard experience. Daily fencing lessons had made both proficient in the use of sword and saber.

Among these woodsmen, composed of laborers

from many nations, they had also picked up a smattering of many European languages, which proved of great help to them on their trip abroad.

Standing firmly upon their rights from first to last, the two lads never allowed anyone to impose upon them, although they were neither naturally pugnacious nor aggressive. However, there had been more than one lumberjack who had found to his discomfort that he could not infringe upon their good nature, which was at all times apparent.

Both boys were large and sturdy, and the months spent in the lumber camps had given hardness to their muscles. Their ever-readiness for a rough-and-tumble, the fact that neither had ever been known to dodge trouble—although neither had ever sought it, and that where one was involved in danger there was sure to be found the other also—had gained for them among the rough men of the lumber camp the nickname of "The Boy Allies," a name which had followed them to their city home.

It was by this name that the boys were most endearingly known to their companions; and there was more than one small boy who owed his escape from older tormentors to the "Boy Allies'" idea of what was right and wrong, and to the power of their arms.

Both lads were keenly interested in history, so, in spite of the manner in which they tried to reassure Mrs. Paine and set her mind at rest, there is no cause for wonder in the fact that both were more concerned in the movement of troops and warships than in the efforts the other powers were making to prevent a general European war.

Staunch admirers of Napoleon and the French people, and, with a long line of descendants among the English, the sympathies of both were naturally with the Allies. As Chester had said to Hal, when first rumors of the impending conflagration were heard:

"It's too bad we cannot take a hand in the fighting. The war will be the greatest of all time, and both sides will need every man they can get capable of bearing arms."

"You bet it's too bad," Hal had replied; "but we're still in Europe, and you never can tell what will happen. We may have to play a part in the affair whether we want to or not," and here the conversation had ended, although such thoughts were still in the minds of both boys when they accompanied Mrs. Paine to their apartment to pack up, preparatory to their departure in the morning.

The packing completed, the lads announced their

intention of walking out and learning the latest war news.

"We won't be gone long, mother," said Hal.

"Very well, son," Mrs. Paine replied; "but, whatever you do, don't get into any trouble. However, I do not suppose there is any danger to be feared—yet."

For more than an hour the lads wandered about the streets, reading the war bulletins in front of the various newspaper offices, and listening to crowds of men discussing the latest reports, which became more grave every minute.

As the boys started on their return to their hotel, they heard a shout down a side street, followed immediately by more yells and cries; and then a voice rang out in English:

"Help! Police!"

Breaking into a quick run, Hal and Chester soon were upon the scene of confusion.

With their backs to a wall, two young men were attempting to beat back with their fists a crowd of a dozen assailants, who beset them from three directions.

As the two boys rounded the corner, the cry for help again went up.

"Come on, Chester!" shouted Hal. "We can't

let that gang of hoodlums beat up anyone who speaks the English language."

"Lead on!" cried Chester. "I am right with you!"

They were upon the crowd as he spoke, and Hal's right fist shot out with stinging force, and the nearest assailant, struck on the side of the neck, fell to the ground with a groan.

"Good work, Hal!" shouted Chester, at the same time wading into the crowd of young ruffians, for such the attackers proved to be, and striking out right and left.

Howls of anger and imprecations greeted the attack from this unexpected source, and for a moment the ruffians fell back. In the time that it took the crowd to return to the struggle, the boys forced their way to the side of the victims of the attack, and the four, with their backs to the wall, took a breathing spell.

"You didn't arrive a moment too soon," said one of the young men, with a smile. "I had begun to think we were due for a trimming."

"There are four of us here," returned Hal, "and we ought to be good for that crowd; but, instead of standing here, when they attack again, let's make a break and fight our way through. There

will be more of them along in a minute, and it will be that much harder for us."

"Good!" returned the second stranger in French. "Here they come!"

"Are you ready?" asked Hal.

"All ready," came the reply from the other three.

"All right, then. Now!"

At the word the four rushed desperately into the throng, which was pressing in on them from three sides. Taken by surprise, the enemy gave way for a moment; then closed in again.

Blows fell thick and fast for the space of a couple of minutes. Then, suddenly, Chester fell to the ground.

Turning, Hal fought his way to the other side of Chester's prostrate body. Then, bending down, he lifted his chum to his feet.

"Hurt much?" he asked.

"No," replied Chester, shaking his head like an enraged bull. "Let me get at them again!"

He rushed in among his assailants with even greater desperation than before, and two young hoodlums fell before his blows.

In the meantime the strangers were giving a good account of themselves, and the enemy were falling before their smashing fists.

Hal ducked a blow from the closest of his assailants, and, stepping in close, struck him with all his power under the chin. The youth fell to the ground.

As he did so the ruffian nearest him, with a hiss of rage, drew a knife, with which he made a wicked slash at Hal. Hal did not see the movement, being closely pressed elsewhere, but Chester, with a sudden cry, leaped forward and seized the hand holding the knife, just as the weapon would have been buried in Hal's back.

"You would, would you, you coward!" he cried, and struck the young German in the face with all the strength of his right arm. The latter toppled over like a log.

All this time the crowd of assailants continued to grow. Attracted by the sounds of the scuffle, reinforcements arrived from all directions, and it is hard to tell what would have happened had not the sudden blast of a whistle interrupted the proceedings.

"The police!" yelled someone in the crowd. "Run!"

In less time than it takes to tell it, Hal, Chester, and the two other young men were alone, while racing toward them, down the street, were several figures in uniform.

"Run!" cried the young Frenchman. "If they catch us we will all go to jail, and there is no telling when we'll get out. Run!"

The four took to their heels, and, dodging around corner after corner, were soon safe from pursuit.

"Well, I guess we are safe now," said the Englishman, when they stopped at last. Then, turning to Hal:

"I don't know how to thank you and your friend. If you had not arrived when you did, I fear it would have fared badly with us."

"No thanks are due," replied Hal. "It's a poor American who would refuse to help anyone in trouble. Shake hands and call it square!"

The Englishman smiled.

"As modest as you are bold, eh? Well, all right," and he extended his hand, which Hal and Chester grasped in turn.

But the Frenchman was not to be put off so easily. He insisted on embracing both of the boys, much to their embarrassment.

"I'm Lieutenant Harry Anderson, of the Tenth Dragoons, His Majesty's service," explained the Englishman, and then, turning to his friend: "This is Captain Raoul Derevaux, Tenth Regiment, French Rifle Corps. We were strolling along

the street when attacked by the gang from which you saved us. In the morning we shall try to get out of Germany by way of the Belgian frontier. If now, or at any other time, we may be of service to you, command us."

"Yes, indeed," put in the Frenchman, "I consider myself your debtor for life."

Hal and Chester thanked their newly-made friends for their good will, and, after a little further conversation, left them to continue their way, while they returned to the hotel, much to the relief of Mrs. Paine, who had become very uneasy at their long absence.

CHAPTER II.

A PERILOUS SITUATION.

"Come on, Hal. Let's stroll about a few minutes. We've lots of time before the train pulls out."

It was Chester who spoke. Mrs. Paine and the two boys were sitting in their compartment of the Brussels express, in the station at Berlin. It still lacked ten minutes of the time set for departure.

"You don't mind, do you, mother?" said Hal.

"No; if you do not go too far," was the answer.

The boys descended from the car, and wandered toward the entrance of the station. Just as they were about to step on to the street, a German military officer swung into the doorway. Hal, who was directly in his path, stepped aside, but not quickly enough to entirely avoid him.

With one outstretched arm the officer shoved him violently to one side, and then stopped.

"What do you mean by blocking my way?" he demanded. "Do you know who I am?"

Hal's temper was aroused.

"No, I don't; and I don't care," was his reply.

"Well, I'll give you something to care about," and, raising his hand, the officer made as though to strike Hal across the face.

"Don't you strike me," said Hal quietly. "I'm an American citizen, and I give you warning."

"Warning!" sneered the officer. "You young American upstart! I'll have you whipped!" and he turned as though to call someone.

At that moment there was a sudden cry of "All aboard!" and the officer, after taking a threatening step toward Hal, made a dash for the train.

"I guess that is our train, Hal," said Chester. "We had better hurry."

The lads retraced their steps toward their train. Reaching the shed, they saw the German officer disappearing into a compartment on the train.

"That looks like our compartment to me," said Hal. "I hope we don't have to ride with him."

"I hope not," agreed Chester, and then broke into a run, as he shouted:

"Hurry! The train is moving!"

It was true. The boys had wasted too much time.

The door to one compartment was all that stood open, and that was the one in which Mrs. Paine could be seen gesticulating to them.

"We just made it," panted Hal, as they reached the open door, and started to climb aboard.

At that instant a uniformed arm appeared through the door and pushed Hal away.

"Go away, you American puppy," came a voice.

Hal slipped, and but for the prompt action of Chester, who caught him by the arm, would have fallen beneath the train.

The train gathered momentum, as the boys raced along beside it, in vain seeking an open door by which they might climb aboard. There was none but their own compartment, and that had passed them. It was impossible for them to overtake it, and there was not a train guard in sight.

The boys stopped running and stood still as the remainder of the train slipped past.

On ahead they could see Mrs. Paine and the big German officer, both gazing back toward them, the former gesticulating violently.

Hal stamped his foot with rage.

"I'd like to get my hands on that big lout!" he shouted. "I'd——"

"Come, come, old fellow," interrupted Chester, "never mind that, now. I don't blame you, but you can see it's impossible. You'll have to wait."

"You are right, of course," replied Hal. "The thing to do now is to send mother a telegram to

the first station and tell her not to worry, that we shall be along on the next train. But, just the same, I'd like to get my hands on that——"

"Come, now," Chester interrupted again, "let's send that telegram and find out when the next train leaves."

They found the telegraph office, and Hal prepared a message, which he handed through the window.

The clerk glanced at it, and then passed it back.

"Can't be sent," he informed Hal.

"Can't be sent! Why not?"

"Nothing can be sent over this wire but military messages from this time on," said the clerk.

"But we missed the train, and I want to send this message to my mother, so she won't worry," pleaded Hal.

"I'm sorry," the clerk returned kindly, "but it is impossible. I must obey my orders."

Hal and Chester were nonplused.

"What shall we do?" questioned Chester.

"The only thing I know to do," replied Hal, "is to take the next train without telegraphing. Mother is sure to be at the Brussels station. I guess she knows we have enough sense to get there."

"All right. Let's find out when the next train leaves."

On their way to the ticket window, Hal stopped suddenly.

"What's the matter" asked Chester.

"Matter!" exclaimed Hal. "The matter is I haven't any money. All I have was enough to send that telegram, and that amount won't get us to Brussels."

Chester reached in his pocket, and a startled expression came over his face.

"Neither have I," he exclaimed, feeling first one pocket and then another. "I have lost my pocketbook. All I have is a little change."

The lads looked at each other in silence for several minutes.

"What shall we do?" Chester asked finally.

"I don't know what to do," replied Hal; "but we have got to do something. I guess the best thing is to go back to the embassy and see if we can't raise the price of a couple of tickets. I am sure the ambassador will let us have it."

"A good idea," said Chester. "I guess the sooner we get there the better. Come on."

The ambassador received them immediately.

"I'm awfully sorry, boys," he said, after listen-

ing to their troubles, "but I am afraid I can do nothing for you."

"Can't you lend us enough money to get to Brussels?" asked Hal in surprise. "You'll get it back, all right."

"Yes, I can lend it to you, and I am not afraid of not getting it back."

"Then why can't you help us?"

"The reason is this," the ambassador explained, "this morning's train to Brussels was the last upon which foreigners were allowed to depart. The German government has given orders that all foreigners now in Germany must remain until mobilization is completed. So you see you are up against it."

Hal and Chester looked at each other, and both smiled faintly.

"I see we are," said Chester.

"Now, I'll tell you what I can do," continued the ambassador. "I can let you have enough money to keep you until such a time as you will be allowed to leave the country; or, better still, you can come and live with me. What do you say?"

"I'm sure we appreciate your kindness very much," said Hal, "and we may be forced to take advantage of it. We shall look about the city this

afternoon, and, if nothing else turns up, we shall be glad to stay with you."

"Let me hear from you before night, anyhow," said the ambassador, rising.

"We certainly shall. Come, Chester, let's go out and look around a bit."

The boys left the embassy.

The streets of the city were even more densely thronged than they had been the night before. Thousands and thousands of people paraded up and down—war the sole topic of their conversation.

Late in the afternoon, as Hal and Chester were walking along Strassburga Strasse, a hand was suddenly laid on the former's arm, and a voice exclaimed:

"I thought you boys were on your way to Brussels. How does it happen you are still in Berlin?"

Turning, Hal perceived that the person who had accosted him was none other than Lieutenant Anderson, and with him was Captain Derevaux.

All four expressed their pleasure at this unexpected meeting, and the boys explained their misfortune.

"How is it you and Captain Derevaux didn't get away?" Chester finally asked.

Captain Derevaux smiled.

"We were so unfortunate as to be recognized by a member of the German general staff at the station this morning," he explained, "and we were detained. But," he added grimly, "we are not figuring upon remaining in Berlin overnight."

"What do you propose to do?" asked Hal and Chester in a breath.

"Oh, Anderson and I have a little plan whereby we shall make ourselves scarce on this side of the border," answered the captain. "We are planning to get out of Berlin soon after nightfall."

"How?" asked Hal.

"Well," said Lieutenant Anderson, "we haven't perfected our plans yet, but we have an idea that we believe will take us safely out of Germany. It may be successful, and it may not. But we are going to take a chance at it."

"Is it dangerous?" questioned Chester.

"That all depends upon how you look at it," replied the lieutenant, with a smile. "It may mean a fight," he added seriously, "but we are prepared for that," tapping the pocket of his civilian coat significantly.

"Yes, it may mean a fight," agreed the French captain, "but an officer of the French army will not shirk an encounter with these German aggressors."

"No, nor an English officer," declared the lieutenant. "War between England and Germany has not been declared yet, but it seems only a question of hours until it will be."

Hal was suddenly struck with an idea. He turned to the lieutenant.

"Why cannot we go with you?" he asked. "We must get to Brussels as soon as possible. If we wait here until after the mobilization of all the German forces, and are unable to send a message to mother, she will be frantic. Why cannot we go with you?"

The lieutenant was taken aback.

"Why, I know no reason," he said, "except that your presence in our company, if ill fortune should befall us, would probably mean your arrest as enemies of Germany. You might even be convicted as spies, and shot."

"We are willing to take any chances necessary to get us to Brussels and put an end to mother's worries," declared Hal stoutly. "Aren't we, Chester?"

"You bet we are," replied Chester.

The lieutenant turned to Captain Derevaux. "What do you say?" he asked.

The captain shook his head.

"It's a bad business," he replied slowly. "If we are caught it will go hard with our young friends,

I am afraid. Of course, I am willing to do anything in my power to aid them, but this—this, I fear, is impossible."

"Don't say no," implored Hal. "Just think how mother must be worrying. Why, we would go through anything to save her pain. Besides, you don't expect to be captured, do you?"

The captain shook his head.

"You have a good plan of escape, I am sure, or you would not tackle it. Isn't that so?" continued Hal.

The captain admitted it.

"Would our presence make it more dangerous for you?"

"No."

"Then, I ask you again, if you won't allow us to go with you, sharing whatever dangers may arise. Besides," and Hal smiled, "you know that four are sometimes better than two."

The captain reflected.

"You are right," he said at length. "If Anderson is agreeable, I shall be glad of your company; yes, and your aid," he added, after a pause.

"I agree with the boys," said the lieutenant. "Four are sometimes better than two, and in an adventure, such as this promises to be, four are

always better than two. I say, let them come with us, by all means."

And so it was decided. A meeting-place was arranged for eight o'clock that night, and, with this parting injunction, the officers left:

"Say nothing to anyone. Do not talk, even between yourselves, and, if you can, buy a revolver apiece," for the purchase of which the lieutenant tendered Hal a bill.

CHAPTER III.

TOWARD THE FRONTIER.

It was a long afternoon for Hal and Chester, and they waited impatiently for the time when they were to meet the two young men who were to be their companions on the journey.

After several futile attempts the lads finally gave up their attempt to buy revolvers, as it caused too many questions, and, in spite of their eagerness to get away, it was with no little anxiety that they made their way to the rendezvous that night.

Captain Derevaux and Lieutenant Anderson were waiting when the lads arrived.

"I am glad you are prompt," said the former. "We must hurry. Even now we may be followed," and he glanced about furtively.

"Which way do we go?" asked Hal, of the young Englishman, as the four moved along the street.

"North," was the reply. "We are heading for Kolberg, on the Baltic Sea. From there we will try to get across into Denmark. The thing to do is

to get out of Germany at the earliest possible moment, and, with good luck in getting a boat of some kind at Kolberg, that is the quickest route."

"Won't we have trouble getting a boat?"

"I am afraid we shall; but we must leave something to chance."

"Well, I guess we won't be any worse off in Kolberg than in Berlin," said Hal. "How do you figure to get there?"

"Automobile! We have arranged for a car to pick us up on the northern outskirts of the city, just inside the line."

"Won't the place be guarded?"

"Of course; but, by a little ingenuity and a bold dash, we should be able to get through. If not——"

The lieutenant shrugged his shoulders expressively.

"Well," said Hal, "I won't object to a little excitement."

"Don't worry," replied the young officer; "you will have all the excitement you want, and more, too, or I miss my guess."

They continued their walk in silence.

Beyond getting into Denmark, the young officers had formulated no plan. But, once out of Germany, the rest would be easy. A ship to Eng-

land, and from there into France for the young Frenchman, and the two American boys would telegraph to their mother, or continue their journey alone. Lieutenant Anderson was bound direct for London, where he would join his regiment.

The officers had decided to make their attempt at escape by way of Denmark because, in all likelihood, the country between Berlin and Kolberg would be less closely guarded than any other part of the German Empire. Troops were being rushed to the French and Russian borders, and they realized it was practically impossible for them to journey in those directions without being captured. Also the southern route offered little hope of success.

The streets became more and more deserted as the four friends continued their walk toward the northern outskirts. They passed several detachments of rapidly moving troops, but they were unchallenged.

Suddenly the young Englishman called a halt.

"The automobile is waiting at the next corner," he explained. "Just beyond is the northern limit of the city. Go quietly and we may not be molested."

Hal and Chester were greatly excited by this time, but they obeyed instructions as well as they

could, and climbed into the big car that was waiting for them, without even being seen. The driver immediately started the machine, and our boys were on their way at last.

On toward the city line the big car rushed, and it was just as the four friends were breathing a sigh of relief at having passed the first danger safely, that a harsh voice rang out:

"Halt!"

Almost directly ahead stood a squad of armed men, their rifles leveled straight at the occupants of the oncoming car.

"The patrol!" exclaimed Captain Derevaux, as the auto came to a stop.

An officer approached the side of the machine.

"Give an account of yourselves," he demanded. "Your passports, please."

"We have none," replied Captain Anderson. "We are just taking a little spin."

"You cannot pass here," said the officer. "Either return at once, or I shall be forced to place you under arrest."

There was no use arguing.

"Home it is, then," said the young Englishman aloud, and then in a whisper to the driver: "Ahead! Full speed!"

"To the bottom of the car!" he cried, as the machine jumped forward with a lurch.

He dived to the floor of the car, the young Frenchman and Hal following his example.

Chester, however, had been so surprised at the suddenness of this maneuver, that for a moment he was unable to move; but, while his momentary inaction placed him in great danger, it nevertheless saved his companions from capture, or even death.

As the automobile lunged away, hurling the officer to the side of the street, the latter shouted a command:

"Fire! Shoot the driver!"

One man only was in a position to obey. The others were forced to jump for their lives, as the machine bore down on them. This one man, however, raised his rifle and aimed at the driver, just as the car swept by.

The muzzle was right at the side of the car, and a miss would have been almost impossible.

But, before he could fire, Chester sprang to his feet, and, leaning out, grasped the barrel of the weapon in both hands. With a desperate effort, he wrenched it from the soldier's hands, just as he was about to pull the trigger.

Then, at a second command from Lieutenant

Anderson, he dropped beside his friends in the bottom of the car, and it was well that he did so.

A volley rang out from behind. The hum of bullets could be heard overhead, and there was the sound of splintering wood, as others crashed into the rear of the auto, but the machine sped on.

Then came a second volley, and the automobile swerved suddenly to one side. The chauffeur groaned, but the car immediately righted itself and continued on its way.

Unmindful of the bullets flying about, Hal sprang to his feet and climbed into the front seat, where the chauffeur was making heroic efforts to keep the car steady, a stream of blood the while pouring from a wound in his head.

"Give me the wheel!" cried Hal, as the car lurched from one side of the road to the other, at the imminent risk of turning over.

He climbed in front of the chauffeur and his strong hands grasped the steering wheel just as the man's body relaxed and he fell back unconscious.

Bullets were still flying thick and fast, but the range was too great now for accurate shooting. Still, there was always the chance that one of the leaden messengers would hit Hal and end disastrously the career of the flying machine.

Without even checking the speed of the auto, Hal called to Chester:

"The chauffeur is badly wounded. Pull him into the rear of the car!"

"Slow down!" came the answer. "We can't pull him from beneath you while going at this terrific speed."

"Slow down nothing!" shouted Hal. "We don't want to be captured after this. You'll have to pull him out!"

It was no small task, this driving a flying automobile, while a man in whose lap he was almost sitting was being pulled from under him by hands from behind.

Once Hal lost his balance. Throwing out one hand, he grasped the side of the car, and that alone saved him and his friends, too, for that matter.

The car swerved to one side of the road, and just at that instant a sharp curve came into view.

With a desperate effort Hal regained his balance, steadied the machine, and, without even trying to slacken his speed, took the curve on two wheels.

"Whew!" he muttered to himself. "That was a close shave!"

By this time the body of the chauffeur had been

pulled into the back of the car, and Hal slid into his seat.

"Are you all right?" came Chester's voice from the rear.

"All right now," replied Hal.

"You can slow down a bit," shouted Lieutenant Anderson. "We are out of range. We are safe enough now."

"We are safe from bullets, but we are not safe from pursuit," Hal called back. "Do I keep to this road?"

"Yes," came the reply, "if you don't run into a ditch or a telegraph pole."

"Oh, I'll run it, all right; and I'll run it on the road, too," Hal answered grimly. "I've made a record on a worse road than this."

"Is the chauffeur badly hurt?" he called back after a few minutes.

"No, I don't think so," replied the French captain's voice. "Just a scalp wound. He has lost a lot of blood, and is still unconscious, but I think he will come around all right presently."

Hal settled back in his seat and gave his entire attention to the road ahead.

The big car flashed through several small towns, and the dim lights in the homes looked like a string of brilliant spots, so swiftly did they go by. For

almost half an hour the terrific speed was continued, and then, at a shouted command from Lieutenant Anderson, Hal slowed down.

"We should be nearing Angermunde by this time," the lieutenant explained, "and it will never do to go through there at this speed."

"Do you suppose our would-be captors have communicated with the authorities at Angermunde?" asked the Frenchman.

"I would not be surprised," replied the lieutenant; "but we must risk it. One thing I am sure of, however, is that our pursuers are not far behind. They will never rest till we are caught. And, for that reason, we cannot afford to waste much time."

"You are right," said the captain. "We must get through Angermunde as quickly and as quietly as possible."

Then to Hal he shouted: "Don't lose your nerve, and keep cool. Be ready to make a dash if you get the word."

"Don't you worry about my nerve," Hal replied grimly. "I'll run right through a thousand Germans, if you say so."

"I guess that will not be necessary," broke in the lieutenant, with a laugh, "but you never can tell what may happen."

Hal reduced the speed of the machine even more,

and slowly approached the town, the lights of which could be seen in the distance.

It was now nearly midnight, and, as Captain Derevaux suggested, it would be wise to go through the town without attracting attention, if possible.

But this was not to be.

The automobile entered the town, and had proceeded some distance, when Hal called back:

"I guess we will get through without any trouble, all right."

"Don't be too sure," replied the Englishman. "Always be ready for the unexpected."

The words were hardly out of his mouth, when, rounding a sharp turn, Hal saw a line of cavalrymen blocking the street some distance ahead.

"The road is blocked with troops," he called back to his friends, as he reduced his speed. "Their rifles seem pointed right at us. Shall I speed up and run through them?"

His three companions arose and peered over his shoulder. The cavalrymen were plainly discernible in the glare of an electric street light.

"It's impossible," replied the lieutenant. "We shall have to stop. They would shoot us to pieces before we could get through. Here," turning to Chester and Captain Derevaux, "cover up the chauffeur with these rugs and lay him in the bot-

tom of the car. It would never do for an officer to see him. It may be that our friends behind have not tipped off our present enemy, but the sight of this wounded chauffeur would give it all away."

The car was slowly nearing the line of troops.

"Halt!" came the command. "Halt, or we fire!"

The car came to a stop within a few feet of the soldiers.

CHAPTER IV.

IN DANGER STILL.

It was with no small trepidation that the occupants of the automobile saw the officer in command approach.

"Keep your wits and say nothing unless you have to," was the young lieutenant's whispered advice. "Leave the talking to me."

"Where are you from?" asked the officer.

"Berlin," replied the Englishman.

"Where are you bound?"

"Stettin."

"Your business?"

"Our business is purely private. Two of my companions are young American lads and the third is a Belgian gentleman. I am an Englishman. You will interfere with us at your peril."

"In times of war we interfere with whom we choose. A state of war exists in Germany, as you know."

"There is no state of war between your country and ours."

"Perhaps not, but I am not sure of it; there may be by this time. You have no passports, I take it?"

"We have not."

"Then I must ask you to leave your machine and come with me."

"For what reason?"

"Because I command it. You are my prisoners."

Turning to an aide, the German officer commanded:

"Call a guard of four men!"

The aide saluted and did as he was ordered. Four of the troopers who blocked the road dismounted and ranged themselves beside the car.

"Order Lieutenant Myers to take his men and report to Major Von Volk," commanded the German officer of his aide.

The troopers, with the exception of the four who guarded the car, wheeled and rode away.

The officer turned again to the automobile.

"Leave the car," he ordered the four occupants.

"He evidently hasn't been tipped off," whispered Lieutenant Anderson to his companions, as they left the machine.

"No," Hal whispered back, "but the others are likely to be along in a few minutes."

"Right," came the reply. "We must watch our chance, and, if one comes, make the most of it."

The four stepped from the automobile, and were immediately surrounded by their guards.

"See what they have in the machine," the officer ordered one of the men.

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Chester. "We are in for it now!"

Exploring the front of the auto first, the soldier found nothing. Then he turned his attention to the back. He lifted up the rugs that had been thrown over the chauffeur, and started back with a cry.

"A dead man!" he exclaimed, and added: "At least he appears to be dead. He has a bullet hole in the back of his head."

"What!" demanded the officer, and hurried to the side of the car.

He drew his sword and waved it at his men.

"Guard them closely!" he exclaimed, indicating his four prisoners.

"Pretty ticklish situation," whispered Hal to Chester, who stood beside him. "We have got to do something."

"You bet," replied Chester, "and we've got to do it now."

He took off his cap, twirled it about a few seconds, and let it fall to the ground.

Chester stooped to pick it up. Rising suddenly, he came up under the guard of his nearest captor, and with his head butted him with all his force under the chin.

The blow was more than flesh and blood could stand. The soldier fell to the ground with a groan of pain, his tongue almost bitten off. Without a pause, Chester turned upon another of his captors, and, with two well-directed blows of his fist, sent him staggering.

The suddenness of Chester's attack had not taken Hal by surprise. When Chester dropped his cap, Hal divined his purpose, and, as his friend butted his first victim, Hal acted. Turning upon his nearest guard, he seized the latter's rifle, at the same time delivering a well-directed kick at his enemy's shin. The man released his hold on the rifle, and, as he stooped unconsciously to rub his shin, the pain of which was almost unbearable, he met Hal's right fist, which, sent into his face with stunning force, knocked him cold.

All this happened in the smallest fraction of the time it takes to tell it, and, before the German officer and the soldier who were exploring the interior of the automobile could realize what was

happening and go to the aid of their companions.

Captain Derevaux and Lieutenant Anderson had acted with almost as much celerity as had Hal, in spite of the fact that Chester's attack had taken them by surprise. Almost at the same moment Hal seized the weapon of his guard Captain Derevaux closed with the third man, and, with his fingers at his throat, was attempting to choke him into unconsciousness.

At the same moment the German commanding officer and his troops ran to the aid of their fellows.

"Shoot them!" shouted the officer, drawing his revolver and rushing to take part in the fray. He already held his sword in his hand.

The soldier drew a revolver.

Hal, having disposed of one enemy, clubbed the rifle he had wrenched from him, and, before either the German officer or his man could fire, was in the thick of the *mêlée*. Lieutenant Anderson, having picked up a rifle dropped by one of the German soldiers, was already there, his weapon also clubbed.

The officer and the trooper were unable to bring their revolvers to bear, and rushed into the fight with their weapons clubbed.

With a single blow Hal crushed the skull of the

soldier, and then turned upon the officer who was engaging Anderson.

Lieutenant Anderson and his opponent were still battling desperately for the possession of the latter's gun, and Captain Derevaux and the remaining German trooper were rolling about upon the ground, the captain's finger still pressed into his enemy's throat. Chester had gone to the captain's aid.

Warding off the officer's sword, Anderson suddenly dropped his rifle, and, stepping inside the other's guard, placed the officer *hors de combat* with several well-directed and lightning-like blows to the face and jaw.

At that moment Captain Derevaux's opponent succeeded in shaking off the captain's grip, and, springing to his feet, leveled his rifle, which he snatched from the ground as he arose, squarely at the young Frenchman.

With a shout Chester sprang forward, picking up a rifle as he leaped, and aimed a smashing blow at the man's head. The clubbed weapon found its mark with a crushing impact, and the man threw up his arms, spun around two or three times, and then fell in a heap.

And it was not a moment too soon. For, as the last German measured his length upon the ground,

there was a sudden shout, and a body of cavalry, attracted by the sounds of the conflict, bore down upon the victors.

"Quick!" shouted the lieutenant. "To the machine!" And, with Hal and Captain Derevaux, he made a rush for the auto.

Chester had stopped to gather up the two revolvers that lay on the ground.

"Go ahead!" he shouted. "I'm coming!" And, picking up the last revolver, he ran up to the automobile and swung himself aboard, just as Hal, who had climbed into the driver's seat, threw in the clutch, and the machine leaped forward.

At that moment a volley of shots rang out. The whizzing bullets again flew around the car, and there was again the sound of splintering wood, as they smashed into the rear of the auto.

All but Hal dived into the bottom of the car, and he bent as low as possible over the steering wheel.

Soon the sound of firing became less audible, and finally ceased altogether.

Chester, Lieutenant Anderson and Captain Derevaux arose from the bottom of the car and resumed their seats.

"That's what I call great work, boys," declared the lieutenant, putting his hand on Hal's shoulder.

"If it hadn't been for you, I guess the captain and I would be locked up by this time. Isn't that so, captain?"

"It certainly is," was the reply. "And had it not been for the prompt action of Chester in that encounter, France would have lost a captain of rifles."

Hal and Chester were embarrassed by all this praise.

"That's all right," Hal called over his shoulder. "You would have done the same for us."

At this moment the chauffeur, who had been almost forgotten in the excitement, stirred.

"Hello," ejaculated the captain. "Our friend is getting better. Guess we had better see what we can do for him."

He raised the head of the wounded man to his lap, and wiped the blood stains from his face, while the lieutenant prepared a bandage. In a few minutes the chauffeur had recovered sufficiently to drink a little water and to eat several sandwiches the lieutenant produced from a small but well-filled hamper.

"Well, I guess we are safe for a little while, at any rate," remarked Hal.

"It looks like it," replied the lieutenant; "but, as I said before, you never can tell."

They rode cautiously along in silence for a long time; in fact, until the first streak of dawn appeared in the east. Then, suddenly, the sound of chug-chugging came from behind.

Chester turned his head and jumped to his feet with a cry:

"We are pursued! Speed up, Hal! Speed up!"

It was true. Far back could be seen a pursuing automobile, and, even from that distance, it was apparent it was gaining.

Hal "speeded up" and in a short time the pursuing car was out of sight. Nevertheless, the speed was not diminished.

"I guess they have learned that we can travel some, anyhow," remarked Hal happily.

And just at that moment there was a loud explosion—the car rocked crazily, and Hal brought it to a stop.

"Tire blown out," exclaimed the French captain, in despair. "Now we are up against it. What shall we do?"

"Fix it," returned Chester briefly.

He got out, and the rest, including the wounded chauffeur, followed suit.

At that moment Chester bethought himself of the pursuing machine, and said:

"We haven't time. Our pursuers will be upon us."

"You are right," said the captain, "but I have an idea."

The place in which they had stopped was shaded upon both sides by great trees. As far as could be seen the woods continued. A hundred yards back over the road they had traversed was a sharp curve, hiding any approaching vehicle from sight. Ahead, the road stretched out in a straight line for a considerable distance.

"I figure this way," said the captain hurriedly, "the machine as it is is doing us no good, is it?"

"It certainly is not," replied the lieutenant.

"And, if we wait here long enough to fix it it won't do us any good either, will it?"

"Certainly not."

"Then my idea is this: Head the machine straight down the road, lash the wheel fast and start her off. If I am not mistaken, it will run along the road at least to the next curve. Even from here you can see the steep embankment at the curve. When the machine hits that curve it will go over.

"Now, if that embankment is as steep as it looks, the car, when it hits the bottom, will be out of sight. In the meantime, we hide here until our

pursuers pass. The chances are they will continue past the curve, never seeing the wreckage at the bottom of the embankment, believing we are still ahead of them. Then we can continue our journey afoot. What do you think of that idea?"

"I think it is first-rate," declared Hal, and the others agreed with him.

"But won't they discover, when they reach the next town, that we haven't passed through?" asked Chester.

"They probably will," was the reply; "but we will cross that bridge when we come to it. Besides, there is little doubt in my mind that the authorities in the next town know of our coming. We couldn't be so fortunate a second time."

Accordingly the plan suggested was carried out. Hal elected to get in the car and start it, and, as it took a flying leap forward, he hurled himself from the machine to the soft grass beside the road. He was considerably shaken up, but not badly hurt.

Then the five stood and watched the car in its mad flight down the road.

"I hope that the fact of a tire being bursted won't stop it's sticking to the road," said Chester.

Fortunately the car continued its journey in as straight a line as the best chauffeur in the world

could have driven, and the five companions strained their eyes as it neared the distant curve.

"It's almost there!" cried Hal. "I hope it makes a good jump; and I hope that embankment is steep."

"And I hope that she makes her leap before our pursuers heave in sight, which is more to the point," declared Chester.

Again they strained their eyes, watching the flight of the mad car. And then the car reached the embankment.

"There she goes!" cried Chester, and the big machine, as though making a desperate leap, hurled itself into space, where it soared for a moment like a huge bird, and then disappeared from sight.

"Well, it's gone," said the lieutenant sorrowfully; "and now it's up to us to hoof it, to the next town, at least."

The five moved into the woods and just as they gained the first dense covering there was a sound from the road over which they had come.

Dropping to the ground, they peered between the trees. Presently a second huge car, in which could be caught a glimpse of uniforms, rounded the curve, flashed by, and disappeared down the road.

"Let's go farther into the woods," urged Chester. "We might be seen here."

Going deeper and deeper in among the trees the five continued their journey; and, when they felt sure they had penetrated far enough to avoid any chance of detection, they turned their faces northward and set out at a brisk pace.

CHAPTER V.

CAPTURED.

All morning the journey through the woods continued. At intervals the big trees became more sparse, and the party took all precautions against being seen, as they flitted through the open places.

About noon, Lieutenant Anderson made a foraging expedition, and returned with a basket of food, which he had purchased from a nearby farmhouse. Hungrily the five disposed of it, quenching their thirst from a sparkling brook of cool water. Then they resumed their march.

Night was falling when the travelers at length emerged from the woods. Half a mile ahead could be seen the lights of a town.

Lieutenant Anderson called a consultation.

"If I mistake not," he said, "those lights indicate the town of Stettin. We shall have to be very careful. They are bound to be on the lookout for us."

"Has anyone a plan?" he asked, after some further talk.

"I think I have one," returned Hal. "It might work out all right."

"Let's hear it," demanded Chester.

"Yes," chorused the others, "what is it?"

"Well," said Hal, "my idea is that it would be much better for us to separate. If we all approach together we are sure to be recognized. Our number alone would give us away. But, if we go singly, or by twos, from different directions, we stand a chance of gaining the city without being challenged."

"A good idea," exclaimed Captain Derevaux; "I heartily approve of it."

"And I, too," declared the young lieutenant; "and I recommend that we put the plan into execution at once."

The lone dissenting voice came from the wounded chauffeur.

"I don't know your plans, gentlemen," he said; "and I don't want to know them. I have had trouble enough. I am a German, and, from what I have heard, although I know I should look upon you as enemies of my country, I do not believe you mean any harm. Besides, you have treated me well, and I will not betray you. But I must ask that you leave me here. I will make my way into

the town some time during the night. I shall be perfectly safe."

"Had we not better make him go with us?" questioned Chester. "Is he not likely to betray us?"

"No; I am sure he would not," said Hal.

"And I," agreed the French captain.

"I am a little inclined to doubt the advisability of leaving him behind," said Lieutenant Anderson, "but——"

"Sir!" broke in the chauffeur. "I am just as much a gentleman as you are, and my word is my bond!"

The young Englishman's face flushed.

"Forgive me!" he exclaimed, extending his hand. "I am sorry for my unreasonable doubts. I am sure that you can be trusted."

"I believe that our friend's decision simplifies matters exceedingly," declared Hal.

"In what way?" demanded the lieutenant.

"In the first place, it makes one less of us. And, again, it does away with the necessity of one of us approaching the town alone, which is also a good thing. While for two to approach the town is much better than four, under the circumstances, two are also better than one, for the reason that they can give a good account of themselves should occasion arise."

"Which is good reasoning," declared Captain Derevaux. "I agree with you."

"I suggest," said Lieutenant Anderson, "that one of the boys go with you, captain, and the other with me. I shall go back a short distance into the woods, make a detour, and enter the town from the west."

"Another good idea," replied the captain. "Hal and I will wait here half an hour after you have gone, and will reach the town from this side at about the time you and Chester arrive."

"Where shall we meet?"

"I believe the best plan would be to meet in the hotel. Whichever of us arrives first will wait for the others."

"Good," said the lieutenant. "The best part of that idea is that, providing we get into the town safely, the hotel will be the least likely place our pursuers will look for us. They probably will figure we will sneak along the outskirts."

"Sure," broke in Chester. "But how are we to get out of the town? Won't the other side be so closely guarded that we can't get through?"

"Yes, I suppose they will be laying for us, all right, but we shall have to leave that to luck. The thing to do now is to get in. We will get out as best we may."

"Right," declared Hal; "and I guess that, as long as we are going, we might as well go now. The sooner we start the better, is the way I look at it."

Chester and the lieutenant said good-by to the chauffeur, and then Chester turned to Hal and held out his hand.

"In case——" he said, as they gripped, and a moment later he and the young lieutenant were gone.

Hal, Captain Derevaux and the chauffeur reentered the woods, where they sat down to wait the half hour agreed upon.

As his chum's form disappeared from sight, striding rapidly along beside the gallant lieutenant, Hal experienced a peculiar sinking sensation in the region of his stomach, while his heart throbbed jerkily, and he turned faint. For almost the first time he realized the real seriousness of the situation.

"Good old Chester!" he said to himself. "I hope nothing happens to him. I wish I could take all the danger upon my own shoulders."

In vain did he try to shake off the feeling of uneasiness that oppressed him; and it was with a heavy heart at the absence of his friend that he found himself bidding the chauffeur good-by, when

Captain Derevaux roused him from his reverie and announced that it was time for them to be on their way.

Striking out from their shelter, the two approached the town boldly. They walked silently and swiftly.

It was now quite dark, but the gleam of a full moon made their figures plainly discernible. At the edge of the town they unconsciously breathed easier and quickened their step.

Just passing the first house inside the city, they heard the sound of running footsteps behind them. Hal looked over his shoulder. A uniformed figure was hurrying after them.

"Run!" cried Hal to his companion, and he suited the action to the word.

The captain also broke into a quick run.

A command of "Halt!" behind them went unheeded, and the two friends sped over the ground, heading for the friendly shelter of the first cross street that was now but a few yards away.

Slackening their speed but a trifle, they rounded the corner just as the sharp crack of a rifle rang out. Around a second corner they dodged, and another, and still another.

Stopping a moment to gain a much-needed

breath, they could hear the sounds of great confusion, and again they broke into a quick run.

"The whole town will be aroused and on our track in a few minutes," panted Hal. "We will have to lose ourselves some way awfully quick."

Luckily, the streets they had traversed so far had been deserted. But as they rounded another corner they saw a crowd of men coming rapidly toward them.

"I guess it's all up," exclaimed Hal, and the two slowed to a walk.

The crowd moved rapidly, and they advanced to meet it.

"No use running," said the captain. "We will try to bluff it out."

The first man of the crowd to reach them stopped.

"What's the row back there?" he asked.

"Just a street fight, I guess," replied Hal. "We didn't stop to see."

"More than likely some Frenchman has been rounded up," said the man. "Better come along and see the fun," and he broke into a trot again.

"We had better make a bluff at going," said Hal to the captain, as he noticed that some of the crowd eyed them queerly.

Turning, they joined the crowd, and began to

retrace their steps. They went slowly, however, and the crowd gradually drew away from them. At last, finding themselves behind the last man, they turned suddenly into a side street and broke into a run again.

Turning another corner, they slowed down to a walk.

"We had better get away from here," exclaimed the Frenchman. "They will be back after us in a minute."

They continued their walk, still stepping along at a rapid pace, and at length emerged, without further difficulty, into a brilliantly lighted street, which, they learned, was the main thoroughfare of the town. Mingling with the crowd, they were soon comparatively safe.

"The thing to do now is to find out where the hotel is," said the Frenchman.

Stopping in an open shop, Hal made an inquiry.

"Two blocks ahead," was the reply, and following directions, Hal and the captain soon came upon a large, though unpretentious, hotel. They went in and sat down in the rotunda. Chester and the lieutenant had not arrived, and once more Hal felt that queer sinking sensation in his stomach.

"If anything has happened to Chester," he mused, "I don't know what I shall do."

But his anxiety was soon set at rest, for a few moments later Chester and Lieutenant Anderson appeared in the doorway.

Hal jumped to his feet and seized Chester by the hand.

"I was afraid——" he began in a queer voice, but the lieutenant silenced him with a gesture.

"Careful!" he whispered.

Hal returned to his seat and Chester and the lieutenant also sat down.

Hal recounted the experience he and the captain had had, and the lieutenant said:

"Then we have no time to waste. We must leave here at once."

Rising, the four companions left the hotel.

"We must get something to eat before we go," declared the Frenchman, and accordingly they dropped into a little restaurant, where they treated the inner man to his entire satisfaction. Then they went to the street again.

"The best thing we can do is to go straight through the town and out on the other side—if we can," said the lieutenant, and they turned their steps toward the north once more.

They reached the northern extremity of the town without difficulty and just as they were congratulating themselves on their good fortune, Hal

gripped Lieutenant Anderson by the arm and whispered:

"Look!"

Not two hundred yards ahead could be seen a line of army huts, extending on either side as far as the eye could see.

"Ummm," grunted the lieutenant. Then: "Doesn't look like much chance of getting through here."

At the same instant there came from the rear the sound of the footsteps of a large body of men approaching with confusion.

"The crowd!" cried Hal.

The lieutenant was a man of action, as already has been seen.

"Follow me!" he exclaimed, and dashed to the right. His three companions ran after him.

Suddenly the lieutenant stopped and pointed ahead.

"Horses!" he whispered. "Good!"

He advanced more slowly, the others closely behind him.

"If we can cut out four horses," explained the lieutenant, "we will have a chance. We'll make a dash and trust to luck and the darkness."

Silently they approached the horses, which stood quietly a few yards away. A sentry passed nearby,

and the four companions dropped to the ground. Fortunately, the sentry did not look in their direction.

"That's what I call luck," whispered Hal.

From behind the sounds of confusion became more audible, indicating the rapid approach of the crowd. At the same time lights flared up in the huts, and an officer stepped to the entrance of one only a few feet from the four friends.

He espied them on the instant, and then the lieutenant acted.

"Quick!" he cried, and jumped toward the horses.

A revolver cracked, and a bullet whined over Hal's head even as he leaped forward.

With a bound all four fugitives were among the horses, and almost with a single movement each threw himself into a saddle.

But at that moment the camp came to life. Armed men sprang up on all sides.

In the very act of digging his heel into his horse's flank, the lieutenant pulled up.

"It's no use," he said quietly to his friends. "To move is certain death."

Then came a voice from right before them.

"Surrender!" it cried. "Surrender or you are dead men!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE OLD CASTLE.

Lieutenant Anderson raised a hand.

"We surrender," he said quietly.

The officer approached, a revolver held ready for instant use.

"Dismount!" he ordered shortly.

The four companions slid to the ground. A squad of soldiers surrounded them.

"Search them for arms," was the next command, and they were relieved of their weapons.

"To the castle!" ordered their captor. "Forward, march!"

With the four prisoners in the center, the soldiers moved away.

"Looks like we were into it pretty steep this time," said Hal, as they were being led away.

"Silence!" came the sharp command of the German officer.

They moved along for several minutes without a word except for an occasional command from the officer.

At length a grim, gray wall loomed before them in the darkness, and without a stop the prisoners were hurried across a little bridge, led across a courtyard and escorted within the structure.

A fear-inspiring place it was, but the four captives entered without a tremor, their heads held high and their step firm. Any spirit of foreboding they may have felt was not manifested in their carriage.

Down dark and dirty corridors they were led, and after many sharp turns, their guards stopped before what appeared to be a hole in the side of the wall. Into this opening the prisoners were thrust without ceremony, and a door behind them was closed with a bang.

It was several minutes before the four companions could accustom their eyes to the semi-darkness, but finally they were able to make out the few objects that furnished the cell, for such it proved to be.

There were three broken chairs and two dirty-looking mattresses, one of the latter at each end of the cell. Also there was a small table.

"Pretty dismal looking place, this," remarked the doughty French captain, after a hasty glance about.

"Dismal and dirty it certainly is," said Hal.

"How long do you suppose we shall have to stay here?" asked Chester.

"Until they get ready to let us out," replied the young English lieutenant dryly. "Which may not be a very satisfactory answer, but it's the best I can do."

"What do you suppose they will do with us?" queried Hal.

"You've got me. If they don't take us out and shoot us as spies, we are likely to lie here till we rot."

"Surely they would be afraid to do that."

"Don't fool yourself that they are afraid to do anything."

"But we can prove we are not spies."

"Can we? How? With the trouble we have made, they won't be able to kill us off quick enough."

"Well," said Hal hopefully, "maybe something will turn up that will enable us to convince them."

"I hope so. But if it doesn't turn up soon, we are gone goslings, just as sure as you're a foot high," and Lieutenant Anderson threw himself down on one of the evil-looking mattresses, remarking: "Might as well take a little snooze, anyhow."

"This doesn't look to me like a time to sleep," remarked Hal to Chester, although he almost envied

the coolness with which the young Englishman accepted his perilous situation.

"Looks to me more like the time to try and find a way out," agreed Chester.

Captain Derevaux, however, also flung himself upon one of the mattresses and he and the lieutenant soon were fast asleep.

In spite of the fact that they had been more than twenty-four hours without sleep, the two boys were in no mood to close their eyes. As Hal said, now seemed to be the proper time to expend whatever energies they had in getting out of their prison.

The boys looked around. There were two small windows to their cell, but it was plain they were too small to permit of a human body being squeezed through. Besides, they were barred. Beyond, across a courtyard, could be seen another wing of the castle. It appeared to be almost in ruins.

Looking from the other window, the boys could discern the bridge which they had been led across. The bridge spanned a moat, which at one time had been filled with water. Now it was a mass of growing weeds.

Hal shook the bars at the window through which he was peering, and one came away in his hand. It had grown loose through age. Still, however, it

was impossible for a man to pass through the window. The opening was too small.

"No chance of getting out here," remarked Hal, turning to Chester, who stood at the other window.

"Nor here," was the answer. "I couldn't squeeze through to save my life."

"What are we to do, then? I certainly won't let them take me out and shoot me without a fight."

"No more will I," declared Chester. "I would rather be killed fighting than to be taken out and stood up against a wall."

"Then if it comes to the worst we will pitch into the guards when they come to take us out and fight until the end," said Hal.

"We will," agreed Chester. "It would be a much more pleasant death. I don't think much of walking out and standing over my own grave and letting somebody shoot at me without a chance to fight back."

They continued their conversation well into the night.

As the first rays of sunlight filtered into their cell a key turned gratingly in the rusty lock of the door. Captain Derevaux and Lieutenant Anderson, who now appeared to have been sleeping with one eye open, were on their feet immediately, and the four friends faced the door.

Slowly the huge door swung outward and a grinning apparition appeared in the doorway, carrying a vessel of water and a loaf of bread. It was an old, old negro, and he shuffled forward haltingly. Just outside the door could be seen half a dozen German soldiers.

Hal and Chester stared at the old negro in speechless amazement. The sight of the old darky carried them back across the sea to the home of Hal's Virginia uncle. They forgot their danger for a moment, gazed at each other and broke into a laugh.

The old negro looked at them in surprise, and with ruffled dignity. He placed the water and bread upon the table, and drawing himself up, pointed to them and then commanded:

"Essen!"

It was too much for the two lads and they broke into another loud guffaw.

"Well, what do you think of that!" exclaimed Chester. "Here's what looks like an old plantation negro, and he speaks German."

"Funniest thing I ever heard," gasped Hal between bursts of laughter.

At their words, an expression of amazement passed over the old negro's face.

"Lawdy! Lawdy!" he exclaimed, a wide grin

spreading itself over his features; "if dese two chilluns ain't 'Mericans," and advancing toward them he demanded:

"What yo'al doin' hyah? Dey tol' me dey dun captured fo' spies!"

Hal explained briefly.

The old negro rolled his eyes in gaping wonder at the recital.

"Can't you help us, uncle?" asked Chester, as Hal completed his story.

Frightened, the old darky looked around; then began slowly to back toward the door of the cell, just beyond which stood the line of soldiers.

"Yo'al jes' wait," he spoke in a hoarse whisper. "Ol' Uncle Billy'll see what he c'n do."

He backed out of the cell as he finished and the door clanged behind him.

"It seems that we have at least one friend," remarked Hal, after Uncle Billy had gone.

"But what can he do to help us?" demanded the young French captain.

"I don't know," replied Hal; "but you may be sure he will do anything he can. He will not desert us. He is that kind, and I know the kind well."

"You can bet on that," Chester agreed. "He'll be back before long."

It was nearing the hour of noon when the cell

door again swung open. Believing that Uncle Billy had returned, the two boys jumped to their feet. But they were disappointed. An officer, whose shoulder straps proclaimed him a lieutenant, entered. Behind him stood the inevitable line of soldiers.

He beckoned the prisoners. "Follow me!" he commanded.

"Where to?" demanded Lieutenant Anderson.

"General Steinberg desires your presence."

He stood aside as the captives filed from the cell. Outside the line of soldiers fell in step behind them.

Our four friends were marched out of the castle and across the field to the army camp. They were led to a hut rather larger than the rest, which proclaimed it the headquarters of the commanding officer. They were ushered inside and their military escort fell back.

General Steinberg sat at a table surrounded by several officers of his staff. He looked up as the prisoners entered, and unconsciously Captain Derevaux saluted.

General Steinberg jumped to his feet.

"So!" he exclaimed. "A soldier, eh? And an officer, besides. I thought so! What rank, and to what command are you attached?"

Captain Derevaux drew himself up to his full height.

"Captain of French Rifles!" he said defiantly.

"And what are you doing within our lines in civilian clothes, may I ask?" demanded the general, with a sneer. "Spying, eh?" he continued without waiting for a reply. "I thought so. Are your companions also spies?"

"We are not spies," declared the captain vehemently. "I was stranded in Berlin and was trying to make my way out of the country so as to join my regiment."

"And why should we allow you to leave the country and join our foes? Did you report yourself to the authorities in Berlin when war was declared?"

"No."

"And why, may I ask?"

"Because I had already received orders to join my regiment, and I did not propose to be detained."

The general waved him aside and turned to Lieutenant Anderson.

"And you are also an officer, perhaps, eh?" he questioned.

"I am," replied the lieutenant boldly. "I hold his British majesty's commission as a lieutenant of Dragoons."

"Another spy, eh?"

"No; I am no spy, and you do not dare treat me as one."

"I don't? You shall see. Stand aside!"

The general turned to Hal and Chester.

"And you," he said, "you both look over young to be taking the risk of spies. How do you come to be mixed up in this business?"

Hal explained.

"Why did you not submit to arrest in Angermunde?"

"Because we feared we would be detained."

"And is that a sufficient cause for attacking a squad of German troops?"

"We considered it so," replied Hal.

"Enough!" exclaimed General Steinberg. "It is my belief you are all spies. You shall be shot tomorrow at sunrise!"

Turning to the officer who had escorted them to his hut, he commanded:

"Return them to their cell and see that they are well guarded!"

"But, general," the young captain spoke up, "these boys are in no way to blame. They are perfectly innocent!"

"Shoot us if you like, but spare them," pleaded the lieutenant.

"Bah!" exclaimed the general. "One is as guilty as the other!"

With a wave of his hand he signified that the interview was ended.

"Take them away!" he ordered.

"It's all my fault!" exclaimed Captain Derevaux when they were back in the cell once more. "I should not have permitted you boys to accompany us."

"It is not!" denied Hal and Chester together. "Whatever may befall us is no discredit to you. Had we not come with you, we probably should have tried to escape the country alone."

"But if you had not been captured in our company you would be in no danger of being shot," declared Lieutenant Anderson. "I cannot forgive myself that I consented to your coming."

"Never mind that," said Hal. "You tried to help us, and that we go to our deaths to-morrow morning is not due to you."

"Fool that I was!" cried the Frenchman. "Had I kept my presence of mind in Steinberg's hut our position would not be so desperate. It was my salute that caused all this trouble."

"Come, come, never mind that," soothed Chester. "It couldn't be helped. Besides, I am sure he had

his mind made up to shoot us, anyhow. Let's not think about it."

It was perhaps an hour later that the huge cell door once more swung slowly open. Uncle Billy stepped quickly inside and closed the door after him.

"Sh-h!" he whispered, holding up a warning finger and coming close.

Silently he went to the table and, one after another, produced from some place about his person four revolvers.

"When I brung yo'al yo' dinnah t'night," he explained, "I'se gwine ter leave de' door open. I'se gwine ter p'tend ter lock it, but it ain't gwine ter be locked.

"At nine o'clock t'night de' watch am changed, an' fer five minutes there ain't no guard in de' hall. That am when yo'al slip out an' sneak down de' hall. When yo'al gits out o' de cas'le, jes' yo'al sneak roun' to de right, an' dere'll be frien's dere."

Uncle Billy again put a warning finger to his lips.

Hal opened his mouth to ask a question, but with a soft "sh-h" Uncle Billy silenced him.

Then, after several furtive glances about, the old negro stole quickly from the cell, closing the door softly behind him.

CHAPTER VII.

THE ESCAPE.

"WHAT did I tell you!" shouted Hal, when the old negro had taken his departure. "Didn't I tell you old Uncle Billy wouldn't leave us in the lurch?"

"What do you suppose his plan is?" asked Chester.

"I haven't any idea, but you can depend upon its being a good one."

Captain Derevaux and Lieutenant Anderson were examining the revolvers Uncle Billy had laid on the table.

"Loaded, all right," remarked the latter.

"At least they won't stand us up against a wall without a fight," declared the captain.

"I don't know what Uncle Billy's plan of escape is," said Hal, "but I am sure it will be successful. I have a lot of confidence in these old-time negroes."

"And I, too," declared Chester.

"Well," interrupted the Frenchman, "all we can do now is to wait and hope for the best."

"We at least have a fighting chance," spoke up

the lieutenant, "and that's more than I ever expected to have again."

"It's a long time between now and nine o'clock," said Chester. "I think we all had better get some sleep. We are likely to need it before we get through."

"Right," replied the lieutenant. "I guess we had better turn in."

The four lay down upon the dirty mattresses, and with their minds more at ease were soon asleep.

It was after six o'clock when Uncle Billy once more entered the cell with their "dinner," which consisted of another vessel of water and a second loaf of bread.

Hal made a grimace.

"Is that what you call dinner, Uncle Billy?" he demanded. "Why, I'm so hungry I could eat a fence rail."

Uncle Billy grinned widely.

"Yo'al will git a shore 'nuff dinnah 'fore long," he replied.

"Is everything all right?" asked Chester.

"Yassah, yassah. Everyt'ing am all right. Yo'al jes' do like I tell you," and the old darky hastened from the cell.

The four prisoners fell upon the single loaf of

bread and devoured it hungrily. Thirstily they gulped down the water, and then sat down to wait.

The long hours passed slowly.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Chester finally. "Won't nine o'clock ever come?"

"Hold your horses and don't get excited," ordered Lieutenant Anderson. "Impatience won't get us anything."

Chester subsided, and for a time the four sat in silence.

Suddenly the stillness was broken by the faint sound of a distant bell.

The young lieutenant pulled his watch from his pocket. Then he closed the case with a snap and rose to his feet.

"Nine o'clock!" he said briefly. "Time to be moving!"

Cautiously the four approached the cell door. Hal pressed his weight against it, and slowly the huge door swung outward. Poking out his head, Hal glanced up and down the corridor.

"No one in sight," he informed his companions, and softly the four stepped outside, closing the door gently behind them.

Silently four shadows flitted along the corridor, out across the bridge and to the wall beyond. They encountered no one.

"Your Uncle Billy is a jewel," declared the young Frenchman, in a whisper.

"He is for a fact," whispered back the lieutenant.

Chester crept silently through the gate and peered in all directions. Then he crept back to his companions.

"All safe!" he whispered.

"Now to get to the place where Uncle Billy said friends would be waiting," said Hal.

"I guess we had better make it at a run," spoke up the Frenchman.

"Yes," said the lieutenant; "some one might happen along and we would have to make a fight for it."

Passing through the entrance to the old castle, the four broke into a run, and turning to the right in accordance with their instructions, increased their speed.

For a considerable distance they sped along under the shelter of the castle wall. Just as they reached the end of the wall a whispered voice brought them to a halt.

"Hyah, sah!" came the unmistakable voice of Uncle Billy.

Turning, they saw the old negro, who had been

hidden from their sight, standing under the far wall of the castle.

"Follow me!" he whispered, and led the way a short distance along the wall, to where were picketed four horses.

Turning, he motioned the companions to mount.

"Which way?" asked the lieutenant, when all were in the saddle.

"Straight north, I suppose," said the captain.

"No, sah, no, sah," broke in Uncle Billy. "Yo'al can't get free that-a-way. Since de Emp'ror declared wah on Belgin an' Englan' dun declare wah on Germany, all de no'th coast am hev'ly guarded."

"What!" exclaimed the French captain. "War on Belgium!"

"England has declared war?" asked the young lieutenant, in surprise.

"Yassah, yassah. I jes' hearn erbout it."

"Then which way shall we go?"

"Yo'al must go that-a-way," came the answer, and Uncle Billy pointed toward the southwest, in the direction of the faraway frontier of The Netherlands.

"But Holland is a long ways off, and the country between must be overrun with troops," protested the Frenchman.

"Mos' all de troops am at de front," explained the old negro. "Dat am de bes' way, sah."

"I believe we had better take Uncle Billy's word for it," declared Hal.

"I guess he is right," said the lieutenant. "Uncle Billy, we can never thank you enough."

"No," agreed Captain Derevaux. "We can never thank you enough."

"Come," said the lieutenant, "let us ride," and he turned his horse's head toward the southwest, and started off cautiously.

But Hal and Chester stopped for a further word with Uncle Billy.

"But how about you, Uncle Billy?" demanded Chester. "Won't you get in trouble for aiding us to escape?"

"No, sah," replied the old negro. "There won't none o' dese hyah Germans hurt ol' Uncle Billy!"

"Well, then, good-by," said the boys. "After the war is over we are coming back to see you."

"After de wah am over," said the old negro slowly, "Ise gwine back ter ol' Virginy!"

With another word of farewell the boys wheeled their horses and rode after their companions, who were now some distance ahead.

"We shall have to go very slowly and feel our way until we have passed the outposts of the town,"

said the lieutenant, as they rode along; and for the first half hour their progress was slow.

Once they passed within a few yards of a German sentry, but so softly did their horses step that the soldier did not turn in their direction.

Bearing well to the south, they passed the long line of huts where they had been captured the night before, at a considerable distance; and now, feeling sure they had passed the last of the outposts, they urged their horses into a quick trot.

"We will try and avoid all towns this time," declared Lieutenant Anderson, "going just close enough to them to keep our bearings."

"A good scheme," said the Frenchman. "We would better avoid the highways as much as possible also."

In almost a straight line, the direction in which the companions were now headed eventually would put them into Holland a few miles north of the Belgian frontier. Following the highways, their way would lead through Prenzlau, Brunswick, and Detmold. But upon Captain Derevaux's advice, they decided to skirt these towns, staying just close enough to the roads to keep their sense of direction.

As the four rode along through the open fields, Hal and Chester continued to talk of Uncle Billy.

"After the war," said Chester, "we'll come back and get him and take him home with us."

But such was not to be; nor was the old Southern negro ever again to see his Virginia home.

And because of the assistance he rendered Hal and Chester and their two friends, it is fitting that here be related the fate of this old plantation slave, who had come so nobly to the aid of our boys.

As the four companions rode away from the old castle, Uncle Billy, with bared head, gazed lovingly after them.

"Praise de Lawd!" he exclaimed. "May dey git home in safety."

The riders disappeared in the distance, and the old negro, after one last glance, turned toward his quarters in a broken-down wing of the old castle.

There he threw himself to his knees, and for long minutes prayed in silence. Then he arose, extinguished his light, and crawled into his dirty cot.

Before sun-up he arose, and was soon about his duties of carrying food to others imprisoned in the castle. Upon the order of General Steinberg he went to the vacant cell with the firing squad that was to put an end to the lives of the four companions whom he had aided to escape.

He opened the door, and then threw up his hands in well-feigned surprise.

"Dere gone!" he exclaimed.

"What!" exclaimed the officer in charge of the firing squad. "Impossible!"

He brushed the old negro aside and peered into the cell. Then he turned to Uncle Billy and laid his hand on his shoulder. "You are under arrest!" he said.

"What fo', sah?"

"For aiding the prisoners to escape."

"But, but——"

"Silence! To the general's quarters!" he commanded his men.

Uncle Billy was led before General Steinberg.

"So!" thundered the latter, after the situation had been explained to him. "A traitor, eh!"

Uncle Billy drew himself up proudly, and the years seemed to fall from his shoulders.

"I is no traitor, 'sah!" he said quietly. "Is I a traitor, sah, because I is willin' ter die fer two li'l chillun, who is so like mah young massa?"

"What!" shouted the general. "You admit it?"

"Yassah!"

General Steinberg's face grew purple and he waved his arms about angrily.

"Then you shall die in their stead!" he shouted.

"Sergeant! Take that black hound out and shoot him! See that my order is carried out at once!"

The sergeant saluted and turned to Uncle Billy.

"Come!" he said.

With bowed head the old negro walked slowly from the hut. Outside the squad of soldiers encircled him, and he was led away.

With his back to a wall and the line of soldiers facing him, their rifles grounded by their sides, Uncle Billy's face turned chalky, and he trembled.

But, as the sergeant approached with a bandage for his eyes, the old negro regained his composure.

For the last time he drew himself to his full height; imperiously he waved the sergeant away, and his eyes met the gaze of his executioners unflinchingly.

"Ready!" came the voice of the sergeant.

"Take aim!"

"Fire!"

Without a murmur, Uncle Billy slid gently to the ground, his body riddled with bullets.

The sergeant hurried to his side, and placed a hand over his heart. As he did so, the body of the old negro twitched, and he made an effort to rise.

The sergeant caught the faint sound of his voice.

"I'se a-comin', massa; I'se a-co——" came the

old voice in a low whisper; and Uncle Billy's body fell back inert.

The sergeant straightened up, and lifted his cap from his head.

"He is dead!" he said softly.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN TROUBLE AGAIN.

All night long the four companions continued their way without adventure. Twice they saw lights of nearby towns, and upon each occasion they bore farther away from these signs of habitation.

The first gray dawn streaked the eastern sky before they drew rein at a little brook, where they sat down to rest for a few moments, and to allow their horses to quench their thirst.

"How far do you suppose we have come?" asked Hal.

"I don't know," replied the Frenchman; "but we have covered considerable ground."

"Do you think we are out of danger?"

"We are never out of danger as long as we are in Germany," put in the lieutenant. "We may be safe from pursuit, but we are not out of the woods yet, by any means."

"How long should it take us to get out of the country?" asked Chester.

"With luck, five days."

"Well, let's hope for luck, then," said Hal. "I have had enough excitement to last me for a long time to come."

"Same here," declared Chester.

They remained in their retreat for some time, and then, mounting, moved forward once more. An hour later they succeeded in purchasing breakfast at a farmhouse. As all were draining their second cup of coffee there came from without the sound of galloping. The four jumped to their feet.

"What's that?" cried Chester, in alarm.

"We'll see," replied the young lieutenant briefly, and stepped to a window. The others also advanced and peered over his shoulder.

"Looks to me like a body of Black Hussars," remarked Captain Derevaux.

"And so it is," said the lieutenant, as the horsemen drew closer to the farmhouse.

"Do you suppose they are looking for us?" queried Chester.

"I do not think so. It's hardly likely they have heard of our escape from Stettin."

"Had we better remain here and trust to their passing by, or shall we make a run for it?"

"I believe we had better stay here. They may not stop."

And, indeed, it seemed that the lieutenant's prophecy would prove correct.

The squadron came on without checking their speed; but, just as they swept by the farmhouse, a squad of a dozen men, headed by an officer, detached themselves from the main body, and headed toward the house.

"We are in for it again," remarked Hal, and drew his revolver.

"Put that away!" exclaimed the young captain quickly. "One shot and the whole troop will be on us!"

Hal dropped his weapon back into his pocket.

At that instant there came a loud knock at the front door.

The good housewife hastened forward to answer the knock, but was intercepted by the Frenchman.

"Do not answer!" he commanded.

The woman stared at him aghast.

"Why," she exclaimed, "it is probably my husband. He is a cavalry officer, you know," and she smiled, and made as if to pass

But the captain again blocked her way.

"Nevertheless," he said, "I must ask you not to go to the door."

The woman gazed at him a moment in astonishment; then a queer look passed over her face.

"I see!" she exclaimed. "You are spies!"

With a scream she evaded the captain and rushed to the door.

"Come!" cried Captain Derevaux, his effort having failed. "I guess we shall have to make a run for it!"

"Out the back door!" exclaimed Lieutenant Anderson, and the four ran through the house, went down the steps three at a time, and rushed toward their horses in the stable nearby.

Hardly had they leaped into their saddles and dashed from the stable, when the woman and a German officer appeared in the back door of the farmhouse, while from around the house came the dozen troopers afoot.

With a shout the riders charged directly at them, bowling the soldiers over on all sides, and for a moment it looked as though they might make their escape.

Then a shot rang out, and Chester's horse stumbled and went to his knees. Chester was flung from his saddle, over his horse's head, and struck the ground with stunning force. He lay still.

Hal leaped to the ground and stooped over Chester. The captain and the young lieutenant pulled up their mounts.

As Hal tried to lift Chester to his feet, a second

shot was heard, and a bullet whistled over Hal's head. Hal dropped Chester to the ground, and drew his revolver.

He turned his face toward the enemy.

"Come on!" he shouted, his eyes flashing, "I'll drop one or two of you before you get me!"

But at that moment, the lieutenant's voice rang out.

"Don't shoot!" and Hal stayed his hand.

At the same instant, Captain Derevaux and Lieutenant Anderson raised their hands in token of surrender; and it was well that they did so, for by that time the entire body of troopers had their rifles leveled.

To have missed at that distance would have been impossible, and the lieutenant had realized it.

"Throw your weapons on the ground," came a command, and the captain and lieutenant obeyed.

Hal made as if to raise his revolver again, and the rifles of the troopers were turned on him.

Again the lieutenant called:

"Don't be a fool. Throw that gun down!"

Hal obeyed.

The officer in command of the troop approached and spoke:

"Who are you?" he demanded.

"Travelers," replied Lieutenant Anderson.

"Where are you going?"

"Brunswick."

"Why did you run at our approach?"

The lieutenant made no reply.

"Well," said the German officer, after a pause, "if you are bound for Brunswick you will get there all right. That is our destination."

Captain Derevaux and Lieutenant Anderson had dismounted, and by this time Chester had recovered consciousness.

Calling two of his men, the German officer ordered the four companions bound. Then Chester's saddle was taken from his wounded horse and put upon another, which was brought from the stable. The four companions were assisted to the backs of their animals, and the troop proceeded forward, the prisoners in the center.

The country through which they now traveled was rough and hilly, and rapid progress was impossible. From time to time they passed detachments of troops hurrying in the opposite direction. They did not overtake the main body, of which their captors were a part, until they reached Prenzlau, where the troop was quartered.

There the prisoners were led before the commanding officer, Colonel Waldstein. Lieutenant Anderson spoke.

"Colonel," he said, "I am Lieutenant Anderson, of the British army, and this," indicating the young captain, "is Captain Derevaux, of the French army." Then, pointing to Hal and Chester: "These two boys are in no way concerned in our affairs, and I hope that you will see fit to release them."

"How do they come to be in your company, then?" asked the colonel.

The lieutenant explained the circumstances.

The German officer was silent for some moments, meditating. Then he turned to an aide.

"Summon Lieutenant Schmidt!" he ordered.

Presently an old soldier entered the general's quarters and saluted.

"Lieutenant," said Colonel Waldstein, "take these two lads," indicating Hal and Chester, "and quarter them in your home. You may remain here," he told the boys, "until I have made inquiries and learned what to do with you. You are so young that I can hardly believe you are spies."

"Thank you, colonel," said Lieutenant Anderson.

"But, as for you two," continued Colonel Waldstein, speaking to Captain Derevaux and Lieutenant Anderson, and his voice grew grave, "the fact that I have found you within our lines in civilian attire would justify me in having you shot at once. But

I shall not dispose of your cases until we reach Brunswick, for which place we leave to-night by train. You may have valuable information. I shall turn your cases over to my superiors."

Hal and Chester shook hands with their two friends.

"I don't know why you should do this for us," said Hal; "but we appreciate your self-sacrifice more than we can tell you."

"Indeed we do," agreed Chester.

"That's all right, boys," replied the lieutenant. "Now, take my advice, and make no further efforts to get out of the country until you are given a safe escort, which, I am sure, will be within the course of a week."

"That is excellent advice," agreed the young captain. "To get through the country now is practically impossible, as we have proved."

"But what will they do with you?" asked Hal.

The Frenchman shrugged his shoulders.

"Shoot us, I suppose."

Up to this moment the colonel had not interfered with the conversation, but now he called a halt.

"That's talk enough," he declared. "Take the prisoners away."

Hal and Chester followed the old lieutenant from the tent.

"Good-by, good-by!" they called to their two friends, as they passed out.

"Good-by," was the response; "remember our advice."

The lieutenant escorted the boys some distance into the town, then turning into a lane, marched them into a yard, in which, far back, sat a large frame house.

"This is my home," he said; "and as long as you stay you will be welcome. My wife is fond of boys, and will be glad to see you. You will have the freedom of the grounds, but remember, any attempt to leave the town without a permit probably will end in your being shot. Take my advice and don't try it."

CHAPTER IX.

A NEW FRIEND.

"Frau Schmidt is certainly a nice old lady," said Chester.

"She certainly is," agreed Hal. "If it wasn't for the fact that I wanted to get out of the country so badly, I wouldn't mind spending a few weeks here."

"Nor I; and Fritz is a likable fellow."

"He sure is."

The boys had spent two days in the Schmidt home when this conversation took place. In Frau Schmidt they had found a lovable and motherly woman, well along in years.

She had made them welcome from the first, and had set before them the best she had. Their room was next to that of her son, Fritz, a young man probably six years older than Hal.

Now, Fritz was of a mechanical turn of mind, and all day and well into the night he was at work in his shop behind the house. From bits of conversation, the boys gathered that Fritz was engaged

in the task of building an aeroplane, and they were greatly interested.

The fact that no one was allowed in Fritz's workshop unless he accompanied them, and the additional fact that at night two soldiers were stationed at the door at first caused the boys some surprise. However, Fritz had explained:

"You see, the government has taken over all aircraft in process of construction, no matter how crude and amateurish, and has appointed a commission to investigate all patents. Of course, it was known that I was building an airship, and, as a result, I am working under government orders.

"If my craft should come up to expectations it will mean a great deal to me, and I probably shall either be put to work building more, or, better still, be made a member of one of the aeroplane corps."

"Yes," said Chester again, "Fritz is a fine fellow. Do you suppose his aeroplane will be a success?"

"I don't know. For his sake, I hope so. As he says, it means a whole lot to him."

"So do I. And I will bet Fritz would be of great help to his country. He is a pretty shrewd chap."

"You bet he—— Hello! What's that?"

A sudden cry had come from the direction of the kitchen, and the sounds of a struggle followed.

"Come on!" shouted Chester. "Somebody is in trouble!"

The two boys ran madly around the house.

Dashing through the door into the kitchen, a terrible sight met their eyes.

Huddled into a corner was Frau Schmidt, and over her, with a naked knife, stood a man, ragged and unkempt. A second man was ransacking the drawers of a dresser in the room beyond. The boys could see him through the open door.

Just as they dashed in the door, the man with the knife snarled in a low voice:

"Give me the key to the workshop, I tell you. We mean business!"

"You mean business, do you!" shouted Hal, striding toward him. "Well, so do I!"

The man turned at the sound of Hal's voice, and, with upraised knife, awaited the lad's attack.

"You cowardly ruffian!" cried Hal, "to attack a defenseless old woman!"

As he spoke, he leaped upon the man, dodging the blow the latter aimed at him with the wicked-looking knife. Before the latter could recover his balance, Hal seized the arm that held the knife.

A sharp twist and the knife went spinning across the floor. Both leaped for it, but Hal was quicker than his opponent, and placed his foot upon the

weapon. With a snarl the man sprang upon him.

Chester had entered the room upon Hal's heels; and, as his friend jumped for the first intruder, Chester rushed at the man in the next room. The latter heard him advance, and, stepping back, picked up a chair, which he brandished over his head. Taking a rapid stride forward, he swung his improvised weapon at Chester's head.

Chester avoided the blow with a quick, backward leap, and the chair was smashed to fragments against the door. Then Chester jumped forward and closed with his opponent.

With a rapid movement he placed his knee behind the other's leg and pushed suddenly. The man went over backward, with Chester on top of him. As the intruder fell, his head came into contact with the sharp projection of the bureau, and when he struck the floor he lay still. Chester rose to his feet.

As Hal's opponent sprang toward him, the lad stepped in close and delivered a stinging short-arm blow over the other's heart. He staggered back, and, as Hal took another step forward, Chester, having disposed of his adversary, threw his arms about the man from behind, and bore him to the floor, where both boys piled on top of him.

While the three were struggling on the floor, a voice from the doorway exclaimed:

"What is going on here?" and Fritz rushed into the room.

He took in the situation at a glance, and, rushing forward, lent a hand in subduing the boys' opponent.

The struggle was over quickly, and, seizing a strong rope, which hung from the wall, Fritz soon had the two men safely bound. Then he turned to his mother, who still sat huddled on the chair, where she had been when the boys entered the room. The excitement had been too much for her, and she had fainted.

She was soon revived, however, and, when she was strong enough to sit up, jumped to her feet, and, throwing her arms around Hal, kissed him loudly. Then she turned her attention to Chester, and repeated the operation.

"My preservers!" she cried, laughing and crying at the same time. "Fritz, but for these two boys your old mother would now be dead."

Rapidly and somewhat incoherently she related what had occurred, and Fritz was no less warm in his praise for the actions of the two boys.

"Those men are undoubtedly spies," he declared. "They most certainly had designs upon my biplane,

which they evidently knew had been completed. I shall turn them over to the military authorities."

He left the house, and in a few moments returned with a squad of soldiers, who took the assailants in charge. Fritz explained to the officer how the two men had been captured, and the German officer complimented the boys highly for their prompt action.

After the two prisoners had been led away, Hal bethought himself of the remark Fritz had made concerning his biplane.

"Do you mean to say your aeroplane is ready for use?" he asked.

"Yes; I am going to make a short flight this afternoon. Would you care to watch me?"

"Would we!" exclaimed Hal. "You can just bet we would!"

"All right, then; come on."

The two lads followed Fritz to his workshop. Inside the boys approached the large air-craft, which rested lightly on its wheels at the end of the speedway. The huge planes which served as wings stretched out on either side like two great box kites, while underneath the aviator's seat the gearing could be plainly seen.

The aviator looked at the machine with great pride, and spoke of the improvements he had made

in the propellers and in the system of power transmission. He explained to the boys that, by this direct system, he had gained twenty per cent more velocity; and, now that the war had begun, he hoped to be able to prove this to the army experts.

The boys helped Fritz push the machine out into the open, and watched intently while he tested the steering gear and tried the ignition. After some further tinkering, Fritz finally took his seat, pulled a lever, and, after skimming the ground for a few rods, the machine rose gracefully into the air.

"By George!" said Hal to Chester, as the craft rose from the ground. "That looks easy. I believe I could do it myself."

"It looks easy," Chester admitted. "But how do you suppose a fellow would feel sailing along up there?"

"I guess it would scare me a little at first, but, just the same, I should like to try it."

After circling around for several minutes, Fritz brought the machine back to its starting point and, lightly as a bird it dropped to the ground.

"Would you like to take a short flight?" he asked the boys.

Chester backed away.

"Not for me," he declared. "I would lose my head sure, if I got up there."

Hal laughed.

"You don't want to pay any attention to him when he talks like that," he told Fritz. "I never saw anything yet he was afraid to do."

"After what I saw in the house to-day, I can well believe that," replied the young German. "Would you like to go up?" to Hal. "You know the machine will only carry two."

"Why, yes," answered Hal; "I would like it."

"Climb in, then," ordered Fritz.

Not without some misgiving Hal obeyed.

Once more the huge machine skimmed gracefully over the ground, and again went sailing into space.

As the plane rose from the ground, Hal grabbed the side of the seat and hung on for dear life. Looking down and seeing the ground dropping rapidly away, he experienced a choking sensation in his throat.

As the machine stopped rising, however, and stretched itself out for a straight flight, Hal's composure came back to him, and he looked around with interest.

Then Fritz explained the mechanism of the machine to him. He showed him how to stop, how to increase the speed of the plane; how to rise and how to glide to earth. He also showed him how to work the steering wheel.

While they were sailing about in the air he told Hal that, if necessary, his craft could make a speed of one hundred miles an hour for hours. He declared it could attain an altitude of a mile. Practically the only danger, he said, came from conflicting air currents.

After sailing around for nearly half an hour, Fritz again brought the machine to the ground a few feet from where Chester stood.

"Great!" exclaimed Hal, as he alighted and helped Fritz roll the machine back into the shop. "No more automobiling for me. When I get home I am going to get an airship."

"Wouldn't you like to go up with me to-morrow, Chester?" asked Fritz, as he locked the door to the shop.

"I believe I would," was the reply. "I guess I can stand it if Hal can."

"Then you shall," said Fritz, and the three turned toward the house, where Frau Schmidt stood in the doorway, calling to them that supper was ready.

CHAPTER X.

IN THE AIR.

THE boys were busily engaged in disposing of a hearty supper when there came a knock at the door. Frau Schmidt answered the knock, and, returning a few moments later, placed before Hal an important-looking letter, bearing the official seal of the German government.

Hal opened the document and read.

"Great Scott!" he exploded, after a hasty perusal.

"What's the matter?" demanded Chester anxiously.

"Why, here is an order, commanding us to report to the commanding officer the first thing in the morning, so that we may be transported back to Berlin!"

"Berlin! What in the world do we want to go back to Berlin for?"

"We don't; but it looks as though there were no help for it. The letter says that, after an in-

vestigation of our case, it has been decided that we shall be sent back to Berlin and that, if we are to be allowed to leave the country, such arrangements must be made by the United States ambassador."

"Well, what do you think of that!"

"It's too bad," declared Fritz; "but an order is an order. I am afraid you must go!"

"You poor boys!" exclaimed Frau Schmidt. "I can't see why they won't let you stay here."

"No more do I," declared Hal. "But I guess this letter means business."

"It sure looks like it," said Chester.

"That's what I call pretty tough luck," declared Hal, when the two boys were alone in their room that night, Fritz and his mother having retired.

"Tough? I should say it is tough," returned Chester. "After all the trouble we have had getting away from Berlin, then to have to go back. Tough is no name for it."

"Well," said Hal, "I guess there is no use kicking. We ran a good race, but we lost. It's back to Berlin for us."

Suddenly Chester sat bolt upright.

"By George!" he exclaimed.

"What's the matter now?" asked Hal in surprise.

"I've an idea."

"Strange," replied Hal, with a smile; "but let's hear it."

"Well, in the first place, you took an airship ride to-day. How did you like it?"

"Like it? Oh, I liked it all right. Why?"

"You saw Fritz work the thing. Did you get the hang of it?"

Hal jumped to his feet with a subdued exclamation.

"I see what you are getting at!" he declared. "An airship! Why didn't I think of it myself?"

"There are only two objections I can see to the plan," said Chester.

"What are they?"

"Well, the first is, can you run the thing without spilling us out?"

"I am willing to take a chance if you are. Fritz explained the workings of the machine while we were aloft to-day. I am sure I can do it. What is the second reason?"

"The second reason is that it seems a shabby trick to play on Fritz, particularly after the way he has treated us."

"So it does," agreed Hal slowly, but, after a pause, he added: "However, I believe we had better do it. To me it looks like the survival of the fittest."

For a long time the boys debated this point, but the matter was finally settled when Hal said:

"Well, if we don't, we are likely to be stuck in Germany until the war is over; and there is no telling when that will be."

"As long as we are going to do it, then," returned Chester, "the sooner we start the better."

"Right," replied Hal. "Let's get busy."

"How are we to get the aeroplane out of the shop? You know the door is locked."

"Yes, but I know something else, too. I noticed it to-day, and wondered why those men who came after the key didn't take advantage of it."

"What is it?"

"The bolts in the hinges of the door can be lifted out easily, and we can take the doors off."

"But we must get rid of the two soldiers who keep guard at night."

"We will do that some way, all right."

"Come on, then; let's get started."

Chester opened the door of their room and peered out.

"Coast clear," he announced.

Softly the two boys stole from the room and crept along the hall. They tip-toed down the stairs, opened the door, and went out with scarcely a sound. Outside they stopped. In front of the

workshop they could see the two guards in conversation.

"We must get to the rear of the shop without being seen," whispered Hal. "When one guard makes his rounds, we must grab him and prevent him from making an outcry. We can then dispose of the other. You wait here a minute, while I go back and get a piece of clothes-line, so we can tie them up."

He returned almost immediately with two pieces of rope.

"Careful, now," whispered Hal, as, keeping in the shadow of the house, they made a short detour.

Out of sight of the guards, they made a silent dash for the rear of the workshop, where they stood, silently awaiting the approach of the guard.

"I hate to do this," whispered Hal, as he heard the footsteps of the guard; "but it has to be done."

As the guard rounded the corner of the shop, Hal struck out. Swift and true was the blow; and struck upon the point of the chin, the man crumpled up without a sound.

The boys bound and gagged him quickly, using their handkerchiefs to stuff into his mouth. Then silently they ran to the opposite side of the shop and waited the approach of the second guard.

A moment later his footsteps were heard ap-

proaching. As he turned the corner, Hal again struck out swift and true, and the second man went to the ground. The boys bound and gagged him, and then hastened to the front of the shop.

As Hal had predicted, the doors were removed with little difficulty, and silently the lads rolled the huge machine into the open. Hal's experience with automobiles had taught him something of engines, so he had little trouble starting this one. Finding everything in working order, Hal climbed into the driver's seat, and Chester, not without a tremor, took his place beside him.

Hal's afternoon experience and his natural aptitude for mechanics now stood him in good stead. Reaching out he threw over a lever and the machine moved forward. There was a whirring sound as the plane skimmed over the ground. As the machine began to rise, Hal pressed another lever, and they shot into the air rapidly.

So swiftly did they go up that their breath was almost taken away.

"Great Scott!" gasped Chester. "This is more than I bargained for!"

With the lights of the village like pin points below him, Hal, who had not for a moment lost his presence of mind, checked the rise of the machine, and headed toward the southwest, gauging his di-

rection by a compass before him, the moonlight luckily permitting him to see.

As the machine settled down to its flight, Chester regained his composure.

"This is more like it," he said. "For a moment I was afraid it was all up with us."

"I was scared for a minute myself," replied Hal. "But you must remember this is not my first trip aloft."

"I guess it's all right after you get used to it," was the answer, "but the way I feel right now, if I ever get my foot on terra firma again I am going to stay there."

Hal laughed.

"Oh, you will be all right directly," he said. "For my part, I like it."

"How fast do you suppose we are going?"

"About fifty miles an hour."

"Great Scott! That's going some!"

The machine was skimming at great speed through the air, flying low, as Hal did not wish to lose sight of the ground entirely.

"This is high enough for me," he explained. "I might want to go down suddenly, and I want to see where I am going. Of course, if it is necessary, we will go higher."

"I guess we might as well fall ten miles as to

fall from here," remarked Chester. "If anything went wrong it would be good night for us."

For a time they flew along in silence.

Suddenly there was the sound of a shot from below, and a bullet whizzed by the flying aeroplane.

Hal sent the machine higher into the air with a jump, and Chester let out an exclamation as he was almost thrown from his seat.

"That was too close for comfort!" cried Hal.

"Well, the next time you decide to shoot up like that, let me know first!" exclaimed Chester. "You almost lost me that time!"

"Hang on tight!" shouted Hal. "You never can tell what will happen with me running this thing, so don't take any chances."

"I'll hang on tight in the future, never fear," was the reply. "What do you suppose that shot was?"

"Some sentry, I suppose. I guess he knew no machine was supposed to be flying around here. That's probably why he took a shot at us. We were flying too low, anyhow. We will stay up here, where we can't be so easily seen or heard."

For some time the boys sailed along without a word, and then, just as Chester opened his mouth to ask Hal where he supposed they were, there was the sound of rushing wings, and, turning in his

seat, Chester beheld a huge shape rushing after them.

"Speed up, Hal!" cried Chester. "We are pursued!"

Without stopping to ask questions, Hal threw the speed lever over, and the machine leaped forward like some live thing.

At the same moment there came the crack of a rifle, and, as Hal dropped one arm from the steering wheel the aeroplane rocked crazily and dived toward the ground.

The bullet had grazed Hal's left shoulder.

With a desperate effort, the lad righted the machine with his one good arm, and it shot upward again.

"What's the matter?" gasped Chester. "Are you hurt?"

"Hit in the shoulder," replied Hal briefly. "I suppose whoever fired aimed at the machine. I just happened to be in the way, that's all."

"But you can't drive with one arm! Hadn't we better——"

"Can't!" exclaimed Hal. "I've got to!"

At that moment both boys were almost blinded by the glare of a dazzling light directly ahead!

CHAPTER XI.

OVER THE FRONTIER.

"WHAT'S that?" cried Chester, in consternation.

"I haven't any idea," replied Hal; "but it looks like a searchlight."

"Hadn't you better slow down?"

"With our pursuers just behind? I guess not." And, with a touch of the lever, Hal sent the machine forward even faster than before.

For a moment they were in the center of the blinding glare, and then they had passed beyond it. Then Hal spoke.

"I can tell you now what it is," he said.

"What?"

"A lighthouse."

"Lighthouse? What do you mean?"

"Why, that brilliant light we just passed through came from the ground. The powerful flares are used for the guidance of war aviators, or airship men, during the night. They prevent the aviator from getting lost, and denote a safe landing."

"I see what you mean; but it gave me a scare for a minute."

"And me; at first I thought it was the searchlight of another airship."

"But why should such lighthouses be in use here? I should imagine they would be used only in places of danger."

"Maybe that is the reason."

"Surely there can be no danger for a German airship around here."

"I don't know about that. We have traveled a considerable distance. Perhaps we are closer to the border than we think."

"Well, we can't get across it any too soon to suit me," declared Chester.

Hal did not reply, and the flight was continued in silence. For more than an hour the huge machine sailed swiftly through the air. At length Hal said:

"I guess we had better drop down a bit. Perhaps we may be able to see something."

Suiting the action to the word, he let the machine glide slowly downward, until the distant shadow of the earth could once more be seen. Then the craft sped out on its straightaway course again.

The twinkling of faraway lights drew the boys' attention.

"I wonder what that is?" asked Chester.

"We'll see," was the brief reply.

The machine dropped still lower.

"An army camp!" exclaimed Hal, when he was at last able to make out the objects below. He shut off his engine, and for a few moments both boys gave their attention to the awe-inspiring sight.

Dimly they could discern the outlines of the great camp. With its thousands upon thousands of huts, it spread out like a great fan, extending almost as far as the eye could see.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Chester. "There must be a million men down there!"

"Hardly that many," laughed Hal; "but there are a few. I guess we had better go a little higher. We might be seen, and a chance bullet might bring us down in the middle of them."

The machine rose gently again; but, as the airship headed once more upon its course, there was a muffled explosion, and the machine rocked dangerously.

"What on earth is the matter now?" demanded Chester.

Hal bent over his engine.

"I don't know what has blown out," he replied. "But the engine has gone dead."

"Dead!" exclaimed Chester.

"Yes."

"Can you fix it?"

"Not up here. It is impossible. I am not familiar enough with it."

"What shall we do, then?" cried Chester, in alarm.

"We shall have to go down."

"What! And land right in the middle of the German camp?"

"I am afraid so. There is no help for it. However, I shall sail just as far as possible before we hit the earth."

Slowly the machine dropped, its strong planes still holding it on its forward course. So gentle was the fall that it was almost imperceptible; but presently the distant earth below could be seen; and then Chester cried:

"Look! We are almost beyond the camp. We shall clear it when we hit the ground."

Hal glanced down.

"So we shall," he agreed, and there was hope in his voice. . . . "Maybe I will be able to fix the engine before we are discovered."

Nearer and nearer to the ground glided the huge machine. They were now well beyond the farthest outposts of the camp, and consequently had recovered their good spirits.

The airship came gently to earth, and the boys

jumped out. As they did so, there came the faint sound of a command and a rifle cracked.

"We are discovered!" shouted Hal. "Quick! To the woods!" And the boys made a dash toward a clump of trees that could be seen in the distance.

Desperately the two lads ran toward the woods, and, as they ran, the first single rifle shot was followed by a volley; but, thanks to the semi-darkness, the boys gained the shelter of the woods unscathed.

Once under the friendly shelter of the trees the boys did not diminish their speed. Rather, if possible, they ran faster. Then, suddenly they stopped; and the cause of their abrupt halt was this:

A heavy crashing in front of them gave evidence of the approach of a large body of men. For a moment the lads stood as if frozen to the spot; then Hal cried:

"Up in this tree, quick! It's our only chance!"

Acting upon the instant, the two lads swung themselves into the crotch of the great tree under which they stood; then climbed noiselessly higher up among the branches. Just as they had succeeded in screening themselves from possible discovery, a body of horsemen burst in among the trees.

"Caught right in between them," whispered Hal.

"Yes; and, if we get out of this fix alive, we are in luck," Chester whispered back.

The horsemen below them did not pause in their march, but continued on through the woods.

"Evidently a scouting party returning," whispered Hal.

And still the long line of horsemen pressed on beneath them.

Suddenly there came the sharp crack, crack, of many rifles; and from beneath the two lads came the hoarse command of an officer:

"Forward!"

The line of horsemen quickened their pace; and then the firing ahead broke into a loud and steady roar.

For many minutes, it seemed to the two lads, the stream of horsemen poured on beneath them. Then the sound of firing became less distinct, and Hal and Chester dropped to the ground.

"At last! At last we are safe!" cried Hal.

"Safe?" repeated Chester. "How do you mean we are safe?"

"Why, you chump, doesn't that fighting going on there mean anything to you?"

"Do you mean that you believe the troop that just passed us are French?"

"Yes; French, Belgians, or English, I don't know

which. But, anyhow, they are friends. Hurrah!"

"Hurrah!" repeated Chester, throwing his cap in the air with delight.

Suddenly the beat of the feet of many horses was heard and the sound of firing became more audible. Several riderless horses broke into the woods, followed by the cavalry.

"Grab one of those horses, Chester!" cried Hal, as he jumped forward and seized the bridle of the one nearest him. Chester followed suit, and both lads were soon in the saddle.

At that moment a large body of horsemen broke through the woods from the direction in which they had so recently gone, retiring slowly, turning every now and then to fire.

"It's a retreat!" cried Chester. "They have been driven back! Let us get away from here or we shall be shot down!"

But, even as they turned to flee, a mounted officer laid his hand upon the bridle of Hal's horse.

"Who are you?" he demanded in French. "What do you here?"

Briefly Hal explained that they had just escaped through the German lines, and then asked:

"Where are we? What troops are these?"

"This is a troop of Belgian light cavalry," came the reply, "a reconnoitering force. We were at-

tacked by a strong force of the enemy, and are falling back upon our lines."

"But where are we?"

"About five miles from Liège."

"Liège!"

"Yes; where did you think you were?"

"We had not the faintest idea, other than that we were beyond the German lines."

All this time the troop had been retreating slowly, firing as they went, the boys being led along by the officer.

"It will be necessary for me to place you under arrest," declared the Belgian officer. "I shall turn you over to the commanding general when we regain our lines."

Hal and Chester were stricken almost speechless.

"Great Scott!" Chester finally exclaimed. "After all the trouble we have had getting out of Germany, then to be arrested at the end!"

"I am sorry," replied the officer, "but I can do nothing else. You are sure to be looked upon with suspicion, having been found as you were, and, unless you can give a good account of yourselves, I fear you are in a serious predicament."

Fighting every inch of the way, the Belgian cavalry continued its retreat, being hard pressed by the Germans, who were continually reinforced.

From the rear the firing became heavier, and then there was heard the sound of a galloping body of horsemen.

"Halt!" cried the Belgian officer in command, and the retreating horsemen came to a stand.

"About face!" And at the command they wheeled to meet the charge of a force of Uhlans.

The Germans came on bravely; but, just as they hurled themselves upon their foe, there came from the Belgian rear a fierce hail of rifle shots. Reinforcements had arrived.

The Germans halted in their fierce charge, and then drew off, shooting as they went. At the same instant a regiment of Belgian infantry rushed forward on the run. They pursued the flying Germans for some distance, and then turned back.

Then the Belgians resumed their retreat to their own lines.

Hal and Chester bore up bravely during this—their first time—under fire. Unable to take part in the fighting themselves, being without weapons, they watched with interest the maneuvers of the officers and the gallantry with which the Belgian cavalry stood up against what at first were plainly overwhelming odds.

Once in the Belgian lines the boys breathed easier.

"Well, here we are at last," said Hal. "I guess we will be able to explain our presence in the woods satisfactorily."

"I hope so," replied Chester.

At this moment the officer who had placed them under arrest approached.

"Come with me," he ordered.

The boys accompanied him to the headquarters of the commanding officer, where their position was explained to the latter.

He listened quietly to Hal's account of their adventures since leaving Berlin, and it was plain to both boys that as he listened he became more and more incredulous.

Hal finished his recital, and for some minutes the general sat silent. Finally he said:

"You have told me a strange story—one that I find it very hard to believe. I must have proof. It must be substantiated. You will consider yourselves prisoners until the matter has been investigated, unless in the meantime there should be someone here who will vouch for your honesty and the truth of this remarkable tale."

"I will vouch for it, general," came a voice.

Turning, the boys beheld in the entrance to the general's hut the smiling face of Captain Raoul Derevaux.

CHAPTER XII.

LIÈGE.

Hal and Chester started forward.

"Captain Derevaux!" they exclaimed simultaneously.

The gallant captain smiled.

"Even so," he returned. Then turning to the general: "I will vouch for the truth of the story told by these boys, sir," he said.

"You know them, then?" questioned the general.

"Yes, sir." And the young captain recounted his first meeting with Hal and Chester and their subsequent adventures. Concluding, he said:

"And I wish to say, sir, that two braver and more resourceful lads it has never been my fortune to encounter."

"Very well, then," said the general. "They are free. I leave them in your charge, captain."

The captain and the two boys left the hut.

"I will take you to my quarters," said the captain, leading the way.

In the captain's hut, seated on a camp-stool, Hal demanded:

"How did you escape? I was sure you and Lieutenant Anderson were doomed to die. And where is the lieutenant?"

"He has returned to England," replied the captain, answering the last question first. "But my story can wait. Tell me about yourselves."

Chester related their experiences after the four had been separated.

"You are certainly a pair of wonderful youngsters," remarked the captain, when Chester had concluded.

"But how did you escape?" demanded Hal again.

"Practically the same as you did," replied the captain. "Airship. Believing that we could not possibly escape, we were left too loosely guarded. Condemned to be shot as spies, we were placed under guard near one of the outposts.

"It was along in the evening that an airship descended within a few yards of us. It had been disabled, and the aviator had alighted to make repairs. When the aviator had thoroughly overhauled the machine, he made his way to the quarters of the commanding general to report.

"As I said, our hut was but a short distance away, and, believing there could be no possibility of

our escape, our guards had relaxed their vigilance. Anderson and I stepped to the entrance and looked out. The guards paid no attention.

"Suddenly Anderson shouted: 'Come on!' and we went. There was no one about the machine, and we started it quickly. But, just as the machine was skimming over the ground, the guards noticed our absence, and, running to the open, took a shot at us.

"I had taken the aviator's place, having had some experience with aeroplanes. Anderson was winged at the first shot, but was not badly wounded. By the time the second volley was fired we were high in the air, and the rapidity with which we traveled made accurate shooting impossible. We reached the Belgian frontier without trouble."

"But how does it happen you have not returned to France?" asked Chester.

"When I arrived at Liège I communicated with my government, and was ordered to remain here. I am attached to the Royal French Lancers, the only body of French troops yet in Belgium. The Lancers were ordered here immediately war was declared, to help check the advance of the invader."

"I suppose the best thing for us to do," said Hal, "is to go on to Brussels and try and find mother."

"It is impossible," declared the lieutenant. "Right

now you would not be allowed to go. And, in the second place, I took the trouble to inquire, when I first reached Liège, whether your mother was in Brussels. Your ambassador, Mr. Brand Whitlock, informed me that she had left the country."

"What? Gone and left us behind?"

"Yes; but not because she wanted to. It was either a case of leave Brussels then, or run a chance of being held there indefinitely."

"Then what are we going to do? There is no use going to Brussels."

Chester clapped his hands.

"I have it!" he exclaimed.

Hal looked at him in surprise.

"What?" he demanded.

"Why, what we are going to do."

"Well, what is it?"

"Fight!"

"Fight? What do you mean?"

"Join the army!"

Captain Derevaux leaped to his feet.

"I will not hear of it!" he exclaimed.

But the idea caught Hal's fancy.

"Good boy, Chester!" he exclaimed. "That's just what we will do!"

"It is impossible," exclaimed the young captain. "In the first place, it would not be possible, at your

age, to enlist. But I will tell you what I will do for you."

"What is it?" asked the two lads eagerly.

"In times such as these," explained the captain, "young fellows like you may be useful in many ways without running the risk of going into battle—scouting expeditions and the like. I will speak to the general about you and see what I can do. Understand, I wouldn't do this did I not know that if I didn't you would get mixed up in trouble in some other way, and in a way that would be much more dangerous."

"We are willing to take our chances," replied Hal.

"Of course we are," agreed Chester.

"Oh, I know that," replied the captain, "and what I am proposing is not without danger. But what I have in mind calls for quick wits rather than for strong arms, although I know you have both. I will go now and speak to the general."

"All right," replied Hal. "In the meantime, Chester and I will go out and look around the town."

Everywhere, as the boys strolled about the streets, preparations to withstand a siege were being made; but everything was being done quietly and without confusion. The great steel forts, some of them

practically isolated, were subjects of great interest to the lads.

"I'll bet the Germans have a hard time capturing this place," remarked Hal, as they examined one of the forts.

"Yes," agreed Chester, "as the battle of the *Monitor* and the *Merrimac*, in Hampton Roads, in our own civil war was the first battle between iron ships, so will an attack on these forts be the first in which such impregnable defenses will be tried out. I was reading about them long before war was declared."

"And I believe the Germans are making a sad mistake when they say the Belgians can't fight," said Hal.

"You bet they are. They will fight till the last. Do they look like people who would give up without a struggle? Look at the way those fellows who captured us turned to face the Uhlans, knowing that, unless reinforced, they were bound to be slaughtered."

"Right. Which reminds me we were in a ticklish position ourselves for a few minutes."

"You bet we were."

As the boys continued their walk, almost on every hand they were mistaken for English, and

time after time they were accosted with the question:

"When are the English coming?"

Suddenly the lads were attracted by the sounds of great confusion down a side street.

"Let's see what is going on," cried Hal, and, quickening their pace, they were soon in the midst of an excited crowd.

In the center of the mob a lone man struggled desperately to shake off the many hands that grasped him.

"Hang him!" came a voice from the crowd.

Other voices took up the cry immediately.

"Hang him! Hang him!"

Hal turned to a man in the crowd.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"Matter? Why, the man was caught spying near one of the forts."

"How do you know he was spying?"

"He is a German. Why else should he be prowling around, if not to spy?" And their informant rushed into the thick of the crowd, gesticulating violently, and adding his voice to the din.

"Great Scott! We can't stand for this!" exclaimed Chester. "Come on!"

Together the two lads rushed into the thick of

the mob. Elbowing and pushing men to right and left they made their way through the mass of humanity.

The cause of all the confusion had now freed himself from the clutches of the angry mob, and was laying about him furiously with his cane. He cleared a space before him. But those in front were pushed forward by the men in the rear of the crowd, and once more surged to the attack, just as Hal and Chester, with a final effort, burst through.

The lads took their places, one on each side of the fighting German, and Chester raised a hand to check the mob.

"Get back!" he shouted. "Shame upon you to attack a single man like this. Is this Belgian bravery?"

For a moment the crowd hung back, then rushed forward again, and the three were soon fighting desperately against fearful odds.

But the boys this time had tackled a task that was beyond them. They struck out rapidly, as did the man to whose aid they had rushed, but the sheer weight of numbers finally told.

Chester, Hal and the stranger all went down at last, and were in imminent danger of being beaten into insensibility.

But at that moment the sound of a bugle rang out, and the crowd scattered in all directions. A troop of cavalry was hurrying to the scene.

Hal, Chester and the stranger picked themselves up and brushed the dirt from their clothes. A cavalry officer dismounted and came up to them.

"What is the meaning of this?" he demanded.

Chester explained.

The officer turned to the German.

"Come with me," he ordered.

The German obeyed and the troop continued on their journey.

Hal and Chester returned to the captain's quarters. The captain was already there.

"Did you see the general?" asked Hal.

"Yes."

"What did he say?"

"It's all fixed, boys," replied the captain, smiling at their eagerness.

"You mean that the general has consented to the plan?" asked Hal.

"Yes."

"Hurrah!" shouted Chester.

"Hurrah!" cried Hal.

"Yes," continued the captain, "you are ordered to hold yourselves subject to the command of your

superior officer," and he concluded smilingly, "which is me."

"And we couldn't have a better!" exclaimed both lads in a single voice.

CHAPTER XIII.

CHESTER SAVES THE DAY.

The day was at its noon!

From the first break of dawn the battle had raged; now, at mid-day, it was at its height. Hour after hour the fighting had continued under a shadowless sky, blue as steel, hard as a sheet of brass. The Germans had attacked the Belgians and French with the first streak of light.

Circling, sweeping, silently, swiftly, a marvelous whirlwind of force, the Germans had rushed on. Swift, as though wind-driven, they moved. An instant, and the Allies broke into violent movement. Half-clothed sleepers poured out. Perfect discipline did the rest.

With marvelous and matchless swiftness and precision they got under arms. There were but fifteen hundred or so in all—six squadrons of French Lancers, the only French troops yet to reach Belgian soil, and a small body of infantry, without artillery.

Yet, rapid as the action of the Allies was, it was

not as rapid as the downward sweep of the German horde that rushed to meet them.

There was a crash, as if rock were hurled upon rock, as the Lancers, the flower of the French cavalry, scarce seated in the saddle, rushed forward to save the pickets, to encounter the first blind force of the attack and to give the Belgian infantry, farther in, time to prepare for defense.

The hoofs of rearing chargers struck each other's breasts, and these bit and tore at each other's throats and manes, while their riders reeled down dead. The outer wings of the Germans were spared the shock, and swept on to meet the bayonets of the infantry.

The cavalry was enveloped in the overwhelming numbers of the center. It was a frightful tangling of men and brutes.

The Lancers could not charge; they were hemmed in, packed between bodies of horsemen that pressed them together as between iron plates; now and then they cut their way through clear enough to reach their comrades, but as often as they did so, so often the overwhelming numbers of the Germans surged in on them afresh like a flood, and closed upon them, and drove them back.

It was bitter, stifling, cruel work; with their mouths choked with dust, with their throats caked

with thirst, with their eyes blind with smoke; while the steel was thrust through nerve and sinew, or the shot plowed through bone and flesh.

The answering fire of the infantry kept the Germans farther at bay, and mowed them down faster —but in the Lancers' quarter of the field—parted from the rest of their comrades, as they had been by the rush of that broken charge with which they had sought to save the town and arrest the foe—the worst pressure of the attack was felt, and the fiercest of the slaughter fell.

The general in command of the cavalry had been shot dead as they had first swept out to encounter the advance of the German horsemen; one by one the officers had been cut down, singled out by the keen eyes of their enemy, and throwing themselves into the deadliest of the carnage with impetuous self-devotion characteristic of their service.

At the last there remained but a bare handful of the brilliant squadrons of 600 men that had galloped down in the gray of dawn to meet the whirlwind of German fury. At their head was Captain Derevaux, and beside him rode Hal.

It was not the gallant captain's fault that Hal was thus in the thick of the battle. This had been an accident, and had come about in this manner:

Late the night before Hal and Chester had been

called to the quarters of the commanding general and dispatched on separate missions. Their ways led past the outposts—even beyond the farthest—where the six squadrons of French Lancers and a small body of infantry had been thrown out, under orders, to make a reconnaissance in force in the morning. Advancing beyond this line, Hal had turned east and Chester west.

His mission accomplished, Hal had just reached the Allies' line upon his return, when the Germans bore down on them. Hal saw that his one chance for safety lay in throwing in his fortunes with the troops.

Accordingly he turned his horse, just as the Lancers swept past on their first charge, and reined in beside Captain Derevaux. The latter had recognized the danger and realized that the boy's keen wit had detected his one hope of life. He had greeted him with a smile; nor had he blamed him for his choice.

And so Hal had swept forward in the charge. Seizing a sword from a falling trooper, Hal, riding at the captain's side, was soon in the thick of the terrible carnage, and, in spite of the terrible fighting, had escaped injury.

Two horses had been killed under Captain Derevaux. Twice he had thrown himself across fresh,

unwounded chargers, whose riders had fallen in the fray, and at whose bridles he caught as he shook himself free of the dead animal's stirrups. His head was uncovered; his uniform, hurriedly thrown on, had been torn aside, and his chest was bare; he was drenched with blood, not his own, that had rained on him as he fought, and his face and hands were black with smoke and with powder.

Hal could not see a yard in front of him; he could not tell how the day went anywhere save in that corner where the Lancers were hemmed in. As fast as they beat the enemy back, and forced themselves to some clearer space, the Germans closed in afresh.

No orders reached the little troop, and Hal could not tell whether the Belgian battalions were holding their own or had been cut utterly to pieces under the immense numerical superiority of their foes.

Glancing about the field, Captain Derevaux could see that every officer of the Lancers save himself was down, and that, unless he took the vacant place and rallied them, the few troopers still left would scatter.

With Hal at his side, he spurred the horse he had just mounted against the dense crowd opposing him —against the hard black wall of dust and smoke and steel and savage faces, which were all that either

could see. He thrust his horse against the mob, while he waved his sword above his head:

"En avant!" he shouted.

His voice reached the troopers, clear and ringing in its appeal. Hal, turning in his saddle at this moment, caught from the hands of a reeling trooper the Eagle of France, and as he raised it aloft, the light, flashing upon the golden wings, brought an answering shout from those that remained of the troop.

"En avant!" came the rallying cry.

The young French captain glanced back on this little troop, guarding his head the while from the blows that were rained on him, and his voice rang out:

"Charge!"

Like arrows launched from a hundred bows they charged, Hal and the young captain still slightly in advance, Hal striking aside the steel aimed at him, as they pushed on, and with the other hand holding high the Eagle of France.

The effort was superb.

Dense bodies of Germans parted them in the front from the part of the field where the infantry still was engaged, harassed them in the rear with flying shots and forced down on them on either side, like the closing jaws of a trap.

Their fierce charge was, for a moment, irresistible; it bore headlong all before it. For a moment the Germans gave way, shaken and confused. For a moment they recoiled under the shock of that desperate charge.

As Captain Derevaux spurred his horse against the enemy, twenty blades glittered against him. The first would have pierced his chest had not Hal struck up the blade with a quick move.

To pause was impossible. Though the French horses were forced through a bristling forest of steel, the charge availed little.

Hal waved the Eagle aloft, as the captain looked around at the few who were left and shouted:

"You are the sons of the Old Guard! Die like them!"

"Surrender!" came a cry from in front.

Hal looked back once more on the fragment of the troop, and raised the flag higher aloft, as he muttered to himself:

"This will be the end. I wish I could have seen Chester once more; good old Chester!"

Hot and blinded, with an open gash in his shoulder where a sword had struck a moment before, but with his eyes flashing and a smile on his lips, the young captain cried his reply to the command to surrender:

"Have we fought so poorly that you think we shall give up now?"

Then, with upraised swords, the troop awaited the onward rush of the Germans; and, as they waited the young captain found time to murmur to Hal:

"I am sorry to see you here now, but you are a fighter after my own heart."

Hal was unable to speak. He put out his hand and the young Frenchman grasped it warmly.

"I guess it is good-by," he said quietly.

Then came the shock. With a yell the Germans threw themselves forward. A moment more and the onrushing horde would have massacred them like cattle. But, even at the moment of impact a voice rang out over the field:

"Forward! Charge!"

Above the din of shouting and rifle shots it came; and from behind came a full troop of Belgian light cavalry; and in front, with drawn sword, rode Chester.

The troop came on at a whirlwind rush; and, even as they did so, Captain Derevaux urged his men into another charge, and pressed forward into the thickest of the conflict. And Hal rode by his side.

Blow after blow was aimed at them, but none

found its mark. Parrying and striking, they pushed on; and then a German bugle sounded a recall, and the enemy drew off.

Panting, Chester rode to Hal's side.

"I was afraid we would be too late!" he exclaimed.

"I am not even scratched," returned Hal, grasping his friend's hand.

A Belgian officer hurried up to Captain Derevaux.

"You have this lad to thank for our opportune arrival," he declared, indicating Chester. "He told us of your plight, or we would not have arrived in time."

The captain grasped Chester's hand.

"You saved the day!" he said simply.

CHAPTER XIV.

A DANGEROUS MISSION.

CHESTER was embarrassed.

"I did nothing," he said. "I only rode fast."

The hurrahs of the men who heard him drowned his words.

"The general will think differently," returned the captain.

"How does it happen you arrived so opportunely, Chester?" asked Hal.

"It's very simple. I was returning from my mission, and was riding between you and the outposts. I heard firing and rode forward to see what was going on. I saw how things were with you. Even from where I was I thought I could recognize you in the front rank.

"At first I thought I would ride directly toward you, but then I knew that I could be of greater service by hurrying back and summoning aid. When I told the general of your perilous position, he acted at once, and I came with the reinforcements. That's all there is to it. You, Hal, are the one deserving of praise."

"And I shall see that he is rewarded for it!" exclaimed the captain. "But your gallant conduct also shall be made known. Certainly I made two good friends when I met you two boys. At some time I hope to be able to repay you in some slight measure, although I know I can never entirely cancel my indebtedness to you both."

In the hut of the officer commanding the division Captain Derevaux went into detail concerning the gallant actions of our two boys.

The general congratulated them.

"I shall see that your conduct is brought to the personal attention of the King," he declared. "You shall both be rewarded if I live long enough to write out my report."

"Thank you, general," both lads replied, and then accompanied Captain Derevaux to his quarters, where his wound, which was found to be slight, was attended to.

It was the next afternoon that the general again summoned the lads to his hut.

"I have a mission of importance," he said, "and I am seeking volunteers. It is somewhat dangerous, and I am loath to order anyone to go. But in view of your gallant conduct, I thought I would give you the first chance."

"We shall gladly undertake it, general, no matter what it is," replied Hal.

"Yes, sir," agreed Chester, "we shall always be glad to aid the cause of the Allies, no matter what the dangers."

"Well, then," replied the general, taking a paper from his desk. "I want this paper put into the hands of General Givet, at Louvain. If there is any danger of your being captured, destroy it. It contains information that would be invaluable to the enemy.

"In view of your past resourcefulness, I am putting great confidence in your ability to get through. The country between here and Louvain, while not precisely in the hands of the Germans, is being constantly overrun with parties of raiders. You will bring General Givet's reply to me here."

The lads saluted and departed.

"You certainly have made a great impression upon the general," said Captain Derevaux, when the boys informed him of their mission. "Just keep as cool as you have been in the past, and I am sure you will get through without trouble."

It was late that night when the lads made their way from the young captain's quarters, passed beyond the outposts, and made their way into the

forest beyond, following the road, but keeping well within the shadow of the trees.

"This is the best summer vacation we have ever had," declared Hal, as they went slowly along.

"You are right, there," replied Chester. "Of course, war is a terrible thing, but as long as there is a war I would rather be over here where I can see what is going on than to be sitting home reading about it in the newspapers."

"Yes; and then you couldn't be exactly sure you were getting the facts."

Shortly after sunrise the boys came upon a large farmhouse.

"It's pretty early," remarked Hal, "but perhaps we can find some one and get a bite to eat."

They approached and found the household already astir. As they ascended the steps, a young girl, probably sixteen years of age, came out on the porch.

"Can you provide us with a little something to eat?" asked Hal politely in French, doffing his cap.

The girl glanced at him, a puzzled expression coming over her face.

"I don't understand French very well," she said, in English.

"By George!" exclaimed Hal. "I thought so.

That is," he apologized for his exclamation, "I was sure you were not French."

This time Hal had spoken in English, and a look of surprise had come over her face, followed by an expression of delight.

"I was sure you were Americans!" she exclaimed, and then added hesitatingly, "or are you —can it be you are English?"

"No; we are Americans, all right," Chester broke in; "but we certainly didn't expect to run into an American girl in this corner of the world."

"No; particularly at a time like this," agreed Hal.

"Oh, I am perfectly safe here," replied the girl. "Uncle, who is a Belgian officer, has joined his regiment, and I am here with only two servants. He wanted me to go to Liège with him, but I preferred to remain here. No one will harm me."

"But the Germans may come through here at any time, and then you would be in danger."

"Oh, no. Several German regiments already have passed by, and some of the officers were here. They assured me I would not be molested."

"Nevertheless, you are likely to be. You can't tell what may happen."

"I am not afraid," replied the girl. "The Germans won't bother an American."

Remembering their own experiences, Hal and Chester looked at each other and smiled.

"I am not so sure," replied Hal; "but if you have decided to stay, I suppose you will. You see," smiling, "I know something of American girls."

The girl also smiled.

"I suppose you wonder who I am," she said. "I am Edna Johnson, and I live in Chicago. Mother was here with me, but she went home just before war was declared. I suppose she is worried to death about me, but I believe it is safer here than elsewhere, and I have heard Americans are having great difficulties getting home."

Hal and Chester introduced themselves.

After a few minutes Edna suddenly exclaimed:

"Here I am, keeping you chatting, when I know you must be awfully hungry. Come with me and we shall have some breakfast."

The boys followed her into the house, where a hearty meal was soon set in the dining-room, and the three fell to with a will.

Hardly had they satisfied their appetites when there was the sound of many feet upon the porch. Miss Johnson glanced through the door.

"Germans," she said, with a smile; "but they won't bother us."

Hal and Chester jumped to their feet.

"We must hide, Miss Johnson," exclaimed Hal. "If we fall into the hands of the Germans it may mean death to us."

"What!" exclaimed the girl.

"Exactly. I neglected to tell you that we are attached to the Belgian forces and our capture would not only mean trouble for us, but would be a blow to the cause of the Allies."

The girl looked at the lads in amazement, but there was no time for words. There was a loud knock at the door, followed almost immediately by the tramp of feet within the house.

Edna acted promptly. Rushing to the side of the room, she pulled open a door to what appeared to be a closet and motioned to the boys.

"In here, quick!" she cried, and closed the door tightly.

As they passed through the door the boys saw a flight of steps leading apparently to the cellar. Hardly had the door closed behind them ere the steps of the Germans were heard in the room they had just left.

They also heard the girl greet them pleasantly, and the gruff demand for breakfast. Edna called one of her servants, and gave an order that breakfast for the Germans be prepared immediately.

"It is too cramped here," whispered Chester.

"Let's go down these stairs. If we were to make a move here, they would surely hear us."

The boys descended the steps. At the bottom they emerged into what, upon inspection, proved to be a wine cellar. At the far side they saw another passageway and moved toward it.

As they did so, they heard the door to the closet through which they had recently passed open again, and a voice exclaim:

"I know these high and mighty Belgian gentlemen too well. There is always wine in the cellar. Come, Franz, we shall explore."

Heavy footsteps descended the stairs, and two German officers hove in sight. The boys, in the dimness of the cellar, were not seen.

"Quick!" whispered Chester, "into the passageway."

As Hal followed Chester into the darkness of the passageway, he tripped over some obstacle in the dark, which gave forth the sound of tinkling glass. The boys stopped stock still.

"What was that?" demanded one of the officers.

"I didn't hear anything," was the reply.

"I thought I heard something moving in the cellar."

Probably a rat. Here is what we came after. Let's go back upstairs."

The boys heard the sound of retreating footsteps, and presently the door above slammed once more.

Hal and Chester breathed easier.

"Pretty close," remarked Chester, in a low tone.

"You bet it was close," was the reply. "For a minute I thought it was all off."

"Well, I guess we are safe enough now."

"Yes, I guess so. But we must wait here until the Germans have left the house."

"I suppose they will go as soon as they have finished their breakfast."

"I hope so; we haven't any time to waste."

The boys sat down and waited.

What seemed like hours later, the door to the closet above again opened, and the voice of the girl floated down the stairway.

"It's all right, now," she exclaimed. "They have gone. You can come up."

CHAPTER XV.

THE FIGHT IN THE FARMHOUSE.

The boys ascended the stairs and followed the girl back into the dining-room.

"Well," said Chester, after the three had talked for some minutes. "I guess we had better be moving. We have wasted too much time already."

They turned toward the door, and, as they did so, Hal uttered a low exclamation.

"Look!" he whispered.

Turning to where Hal pointed, Chester and Edna beheld a face pressed against the window pane.

"It is one of the German officers!" cried the girl. "He has returned for something."

It was apparent that the officer had seen the two boys. He turned from the window, and the lads saw him making violent gestures to someone in the distance. A moment later two soldiers joined him, and the trio turned toward the door.

There came a loud knock, followed by the sound of footsteps in the hall, as one of the servants went to open the door.

"Do not open the door, Bento!" called the girl.

The footsteps halted.

"Open that door at once!" came a voice of command from outside.

Again came the sound of footsteps, as the servant, evidently frightened, moved toward the door.

"Bento! Do as I command you! Do not open the door!" cried the girl again, and the servant stopped.

"Break down the door!" came the command from outside.

"What shall we do?" cried the girl, clasping her hands nervously.

"Fight!" was Hal's brief reply.

His eyes roved about the room. His gaze fell upon a pair of old dueling swords hung upon the wall. Stepping on a chair, he took them down, and passed one to Chester.

At that instant there came the sound of a crash, as the door gave way, followed by a command from the officer:

"Follow me!"

Edna and the two boys retreated to the far end of the room, as the three Germans rushed through the door.

"Surrender!" cried the officer.

"Come and take us!" replied Hal, his lips set grimly.

The officer covered the lads with his two pistols.

"Stun them with your rifle butts, my lads!" he cried to his soldiers. "Take the spies alive!"

Reversing their weapons, the two soldiers strode forward. As one raised his rifle preparatory to bringing it down upon his head, Chester leaped forward between them, thinking to take the officer, who stood behind them, unprepared, and cut him down.

But, even as he stepped forward, the officer's revolver spoke, and Chester fell to the floor with a groan, a bullet in his chest. But, at that instant, and before the officer could fire again, Hal, who also had avoided the attack of the two soldiers, sprang forward and aimed a slashing blow at the officer.

The latter warded off the blow with his arm, but one of his pistols was sent flying from his grasp. As he raised his other revolver, his arm was suddenly seized from behind, and Edna attempted to wrench the revolver from him. He turned on her, and as he did so the revolver came away in her hand.

Pointing the weapon straight at the officer, the

girl pulled the trigger; but the revolver missed fire. Stepping back, as the officer advanced, the girl grasped the pistol by the muzzle and hurled it squarely in his face. With blood gushing from his mouth and nose, the man fell to the floor.

In the meantime Hal had turned swiftly once more to face the second attack of the two soldiers. As they again raised their rifles to strike him down, he leaped between them, thrusting with his sword.

Pierced through the shoulder, one of the soldiers threw up his arm and staggered back. In doing so he struck the arm of his companion, and the latter's blow was deflected; and Hal was unharmed.

Turning, Hal dashed into the next room—the parlor—closely followed by the two soldiers, the wounded man not being seriously hurt. At the same time the German officer sat up on the floor, looked around dazedly, then picked up one of his revolvers, drew his sword, and followed his men.

"Shoot the dog in the legs!" he commanded, and the soldiers brought their rifles to their shoulders.

An instant before they fired Hal sprang upon the piano stool, which was just behind him, and the bullets went low. Hal jumped to the top of the piano, and then dropped behind it. As the soldiers

again prepared to fire, Hal put his shoulder to the piano, and sent it tumbling over, and the bullets were imbedded in the soft wood.

Hal ducked as the officer raised his revolver and fired at him, and then, stepping around the piano, made a sweeping slash at the officer. The sword struck the latter on his pistol hand, and, with a groan, the officer dropped his revolver.

Hal turned to the two soldiers, who had leaped on the overturned piano to get at him before he stepped from behind it, and again his sword darted out. The thrust went true, and one soldier fell to the floor, blood streaming from a deep wound in his chest.

Before the second soldier could bring his rifle to bear, Hal ran from the room into the hall. The soldier followed. In the hall, dimly lighted by a single chandelier over the stairway, Hal sprang up the steps.

At the bottom of the steps the soldier stopped and took aim at the lad. With a backward sweep of his sword, Hal knocked the chandelier crashing to the floor, throwing the hall into inky darkness, and with a quick leap was several steps higher up.

There came the sharp crack of a rifle, and the hall was lighted for a second by a flash, as a bullet sped past Hal. With a light leap the lad dropped

over the railing into the hall, and, taking a step forward, lunged swiftly in the darkness from where came the sound of a muttered imprecation. There was a stifled groan, and the second soldier dropped to the floor.

Hal made his way back to the parlor, where the German officer still stood, trying to bind up his injured hand with a handkerchief. He saw Hal approach, and raised his sword, taking a step forward. At the same moment, Edna, who had in the meantime dragged Chester's inert body out of harm's way, stepped into the room.

His face red with fury, the German officer took another stride forward, and thrust. The blade passed through Hal's guard and through the side of his open coat, grazing his body.

As the sword went through the boy's coat, it looked to Edna as though the lad must have met his death; and she screamed. The German officer laughed gleefully, but, even as he did so, Hal, smiling, took a step forward.

With a quick stroke, he sent the German's sword flying from his grasp, and the officer was at his mercy.

The German's rage burst like a bubble.

"Kill me!" he said quietly to Hal.

"No," replied the lad; "I cannot kill a man in cold blood. Pick up your sword."

The officer obeyed, and Hal placed himself on guard. But, taking the weapon by the blade, the German extended the hilt to Hal.

"I surrender," he said.

The lad took the extended sword, and then passed it back to the officer.

"Keep your sword, sir," he said.

The German glanced at him a moment in silence; then took the sword.

"You are a generous enemy, sir," he said. "You will have no occasion to regret your confidence in me."

"I am sure of it, sir," was the lad's answer. "You are at liberty to leave at any time you choose."

The officer scrutinized Hal closely.

"You are a gallant lad," he said finally. "There are few men who could have done what you have. I hope that we may meet again."

Turning, with a polite bow, first to Edna and then to Hal, he made his way from the house and was gone.

"How is Chester?" was Hal's first question, after the German had departed.

"He has recovered consciousness," replied the

girl. "He is badly wounded, but I believe he will be all right in a few days. Bento, who has some knowledge of medicine, is attending him."

Hal hurried to the room upstairs where Chester had been carried. Chester, lying in bed, greeted him with a smile.

"You certainly have all the luck!" he exclaimed. "Here I was unable to walk while you were doing all the fighting."

"Never mind that," replied Hal. "How do you feel? Are you in pain?"

"Not much, now," was the reply. "Bento is quite a surgeon. He has fixed me up to the queen's taste. It appears the ball glanced off my third rib."

"But you won't be able to travel!"

"I am afraid not. I am so weak I cannot stand. But you must go on just the same."

"What! And leave you here?"

"Of course. I shall be perfectly safe here, more so than you will be on the road. I wish I could go with you, but I am afraid it will be a day or two before I can walk."

"Then I shall wait for you."

"What! Then how about the letter to General Givet, at Louvain?"

"It will have to wait."

Chester raised himself feebly on one elbow and looked at Hal in surprise.

"A fellow like you to say a thing like that!" he exclaimed. "That letter must be delivered at once. You and I are of secondary importance. If you had been wounded instead of me I should have gone on without you, much as I should have hated to do so. The letter must be delivered immediately."

"You are right, as usual," replied Hal, after a pause. "The letter must come first. But I hate to leave you here alone."

"Alone?" exclaimed Edna, who up to this time had remained silent. "Do not I count for something?"

"I beg your pardon," said Hal. "I spoke thoughtlessly. I am sure he will receive the best of attention at your hands."

"There is no question about that," replied Chester.

"Well, I must be going, then," said Hal. "I have delayed too long already."

"You will stop by on your return, will you not?" asked the girl.

"Yes, if I come this way; and I see no reason why I should not."

"I shall be ready to travel when you return," said Chester.

"All right," replied Hal. "But, if I have not returned in three days, you will know something has happened to me, and you will make your way back to Liège alone."

Chester agreed to this, the two lads shook hands, and Hal left the house and set out upon his journey to Louvain.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN THE HANDS OF THE ENEMY.

ALTHOUGH it had been a trying morning for Hal, and he was very tired, the lad continued on his way as swiftly as possible. From time to time, as he hastened along, he heard the sound of distant firing, and he proceeded with the greatest caution; but he encountered no more of the enemy.

It was late afternoon when he made out in the distance the town of Louvain. He quickened his pace, and soon came upon the outposts.

"I have a communication for General Givet," he told the soldier who stopped him.

The soldier lowered the weapon, with which he had barred the lad's progress, and called a nearby officer. The latter led Hal to the general's quarters.

Hal gave General Givet the letter, and stood at attention. The general read in silence. Then he turned to Hal.

"All right," he said briefly, signifying that Hal might go.

"But, general," said the lad, "I was ordered to bring back your answer."

The general looked at him in surprise.

"Do you mean you intend to go back to-night?" he demanded.

"I thought I would start along about midnight," replied Hal. "I would sleep until that time."

The general was silent for some moments, musing.

"You are a brave lad," he said, at last. "I had figured on sending my answer by another courier; but perhaps your plan is better. You may report to me at midnight, and I shall have the answer ready."

Hal saluted and turned to leave the hut.

"Wait a minute," commanded the general. "Tell me something of yourself. How comes it that you, an American, I take it, have been selected for such perilous work? Why, you cannot be more than eighteen years old."

"Seventeen, general," replied Hal, with a smile; and then he told the Belgian officer of his experiences since leaving Berlin.

The old general was amazed.

"Remarkable! remarkable!" he repeated, time after time.

Finally he called an officer, and commanded that the latter find Hal a place to sleep.

"Remember, midnight," called the general, as Hal was leaving the hut.

Hal saluted again.

"Yes, general," he replied, and followed the young officer.

Promptly at midnight Hal, greatly refreshed by a sound sleep and hearty meal, once more entered the general's quarters and came to attention.

"The answer you are to carry back is simply: 'I shall act upon your plan,'" said General Givet. "Good luck to you on your journey, and I have only one command: Make all possible haste."

Hal saluted and set out on his return journey to Liège.

It was early morning when he came once more to the farmhouse where he had fought so nobly the day before. His fear for Chester's safety increased as he approached, and it was not without some misgiving that he ascended the porch steps and knocked softly at the door.

He heard a light footstep within, the door swung open, and Edna peered forth at him.

"What! Back so soon?" she exclaimed gladly.

"Yes, I made pretty good time. How is Chester?"

Hal's doubts were soon set at rest.

"He is much better this morning than could have been expected," replied the girl. "He ate a hearty breakfast, and says he is feeling fine."

Hal followed her up the steps to where Chester lay, impatiently awaiting his coming. Edna went downstairs to see about getting him something to eat.

"Will you be able to leave to-day?" asked Hal, of Chester.

"I am ready to go right now. I am still weak, but I am sure I can make it all right. I'm bandaged up fine."

"You are sure you are feeling fit?"

"Certainly. Besides, I don't want to be left behind again. You are having all the fun. I want to get in on a little of it myself."

And so it was arranged that the boys should leave immediately after luncheon. They sought long and earnestly during the morning to prevail upon Edna to accompany them, or to make her way to Louvain; but she declared her intention of remaining where she was.

"I am much safer here than I should be on the road," she said. "No one will harm me. Besides, I must take care of the house."

Unable to shake her determination, the boys

gave up the attempt, and for the rest of the morning the three chatted pleasantly.

Luncheon over, the boys immediately prepared to fare forth again. Edna accompanied them to the bottom of the steps, where they said good-by.

"Come and see me again," she urged, as they shook hands with her. "You are always welcome here."

"We certainly shall," cried both lads together, as they started upon their way.

Chester was still weak, but he walked along wonderfully well, considering the nature of his wound. Still, it was plain to Hal that every step cost him an effort, and their progress was necessarily slow.

All afternoon they plodded onward without encountering the enemy, and soon after nightfall came upon the place where the Belgian outposts had been stationed the night before. The signs of a struggle were plainly evident.

"There has been a battle here," remarked Hal, after inspecting the ground.

"There is no doubt about that," returned Chester, "and the Belgians have been driven back. We shall have to be careful."

They were proceeding on their way more cautiously than before, when from ahead there suddenly came the sound of trampling hoofs.

"A Belgian reconnoitering party, I guess," said Hal. "We are safe enough now."

Presently a body of horsemen came into view. The lads continued toward them, and the horsemen were but a few yards away, when Chester cried suddenly:

"They're Germans!"

It was true. It was a squadron of Uhlans, returning from a reconnaissance of the Belgian position.

It was too late for the boys to run. The cavalry was upon them. The lads stepped to the side of the road, and continued on their way apparently unconcerned. A German officer stopped them.

"Who are you?" he demanded. "What are you doing here?"

"We are American boys," replied Hal, "and are making our way to Liège."

"Well, you won't get to Liège to-night. Turn about and march the other way."

There was nothing to do but obey. With a sinking sensation in their hearts the lads about-faced and headed toward the great German camp. For a long time, it seemed to them, they were marched along slowly, and finally the first huts of the German army came into view.

"I am afraid our mission is a failure," whispered

Hal, as the two lads were led to a hut and placed under heavy guard.

"It looks that way," Chester agreed; "but we must hope for the best. It may be lucky for us that we have no papers on us."

"What are they going to do with us?" Hal asked one of their guards.

"Shoot you in the morning, I suppose," was the answer. "Persons found between the two armies in civilian clothes cannot hope for mercy."

"But we are not spies!" cried Chester.

"Perhaps not; but I don't believe that will make any difference."

The guard would talk no more.

"Our only chance is that they believe we were trying to get to Liège simply to get out of the country," whispered Chester. "If they knew we were just returning from a mission, we would be bound to die."

"Looks to me as though we were bound to die, no matter what they know," was the reply.

The boys got little sleep that night. They realized just how near they were to death, and, while their courage never faltered, they nevertheless had practically given up all hope.

At the first streak of dawn they were led to the quarters of the division commander, and their case

was disposed of with remarkable rapidity. Their protests availed nothing, and they were sentenced to be taken out and shot.

With a firm step the two lads walked to the place of execution, surrounded by their guards. But the hearts of both were heavy.

"I wish I could have seen mother once more," said Hal softly.

Chester gave his chum's hand a slight squeeze.

"Well, it can't be helped now," he replied, with an attempt to appear cheerful. "But come, brace up; if we must die, we will die bravely."

"You are right," said Hal, brushing the tears from his eyes with a rapid movement.

With heads erect, the two lads marched on.

At that moment a group of German officers approached on horseback. They eyed the two captives, and suddenly one left his companions and rode over to the firing squad. The officer in command of the squad halted his men and saluted.

"What have we here?" demanded the newcomer.

"Two spies, sir," was the reply. "They were taken between the lines, and have been ordered shot."

"These two boys are my business," declared the mounted officer, a note of authority in his voice.

"Their execution is stayed. Take them to my headquarters."

"But, general——" began the officer in charge of the squad.

The general raised a hand imperiously.

"There are no 'buts,'" he said. "You have heard my command. Obey it."

Hal and Chester were dumfounded. As their guards turned and marched them in the direction of the general's quarters, Hal asked of Chester:

"Do you remember him?"

Chester nodded in the affirmative.

For the German officer who had thus saved them from death before a firing squad was none other than the officer whom they had encountered in the station at Berlin, the man who had threatened to have Hal whipped for accidentally bumping into him, and had pushed him from the train.

CHAPTER XVII.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

"WHAT do you suppose is going to happen now?" asked Chester breathlessly.

"It's too deep for me," replied Hal. "I can't imagine what he wants with us."

"But who is he? That's what I would like to know," demanded Chester.

"I haven't the faintest idea, but he must be someone of importance."

"Oh, he's important enough, all right. You noticed his command was obeyed."

"Well, I guess we shall find out in good time who he is," returned Hal.

The lads were taken to a large hut in the center of a great camp. The hut was luxuriously appointed, and it was plainly evident that the man who had saved them was one of the foremost of the huge German host.

The general himself had not arrived yet. But, after a long wait, he came in, alone. He motioned their guards away, and then turned on the boys with a scowl.

"Do you remember me?" he demanded.

The two lads nodded affirmatively. They were, for the moment, beyond speech.

"And I remember you," went on the general. "You," he continued, pointing to Hal, "are the American upstart who almost knocked me over in the station at Berlin. I said I would have you whipped. Well, my time has come. Now, you just sit quiet," he said loudly, as Hal and Chester took a step forward. "I will write out your sentence right now," and he turned toward a table.

"I won't be whipped!" cried Hal to Chester. "They will have to kill me first!"

The general paid no attention to this remark, but continued to write in silence. Finally he arose, with a paper in his hand.

"Here is your sentence," he said, turning to Hal. "Read, and see what you think of it."

Hal took the paper the general extended to him. As he read an expression of amazement passed over his face.

Hal passed the paper to Chester without a word, and, as Chester read, he also grew amazed. And no wonder.

For what the general had written was a safe-conduct for both lads to the Belgian lines; and the signature at the bottom was that of General Count

Von Moltke, commander-in-chief of all the German armies!

Hal stepped forward.

"General," he stammered, "we—I—we don't know how to thank you."

The general raised a hand and said gruffly:

"Never mind that." The faint shadow of a smile flitted over his stern countenance. "I suppose," he continued, "that you are wondering why I do this, after what occurred in the station at Berlin. It is so, is it not?"

"It is very strange," muttered Chester, and Hal nodded his head in assent.

"Well, I'll tell you," said the general. "You remember when I pushed you away from the train?" he queried, turning to Hal.

Hal nodded.

"When I turned round after that, feeling greatly pleased with myself, I noticed, for the first time, the presence of a lady in my compartment. She looked at me in the greatest contempt. It confused me; and I am not easily confused.

"Then she told me that she was your mother, and, you may believe, berated me most wonderfully. She didn't cry, nor go into hysterics, which made a great impression on me. Most mothers would. I felt decidedly uncomfortable.

"I realized that I had acted like a boor. We had gone some distance, but I had the train stopped and backed into the station. You were not there. I telephoned your ambassador. You had been there and gone. We were unable to find you.

"I prevailed upon your mother to continue her journey to Brussels. I issued an order to all my generals to keep a lookout for you and give you safe-conduct into Belgium. It seems, however, that none of them recognized you, or that you kept out of sight.

"I promised your mother I would get you out of the country in some way, and she was greatly relieved. She knew I would do it. That's all there is to the story. Now, I don't know what you lads were doing when you were captured, and I don't want to know. If you are mixed up in this war in any way, I don't want to know anything about it; but, if you are, take my advice and go home to America. As I say, I don't want to know what you have been doing since you left Berlin. It might force me to change my attitude. I promised your mother I would get you out of Germany, and I shall do it."

Hal and Chester were greatly surprised by this recital, and both boys thanked the general as well as they could.

The general stepped to the entrance of his hut, and raised his hand. An officer entered and came to a salute.

"I have given these two lads safe-conduct into the Belgian lines," said the general. "See that they get there in safety."

"Yes, general," said the officer.

The general turned to the two boys.

"You would better go now," he said.

He extended his hand, and both boys grasped it heartily.

"Good luck to you," he called, as they followed the officer from the hut; "my regards to your mother."

And that was the last the boys saw of the commander-in-chief of all the armed hosts of Germany.

Straight through the great German camp the officer led the boys swiftly. At the farthest outposts he halted, and signaled another officer.

"Lieutenant," he commanded, "take a flag of truce and escort these boys to the Belgian lines. They have been given safe-conduct by General Von Moltke."

The officer saluted, and the boys followed him. Under a flag of truce they traversed the distance between the Belgian lines.

Out of danger at last, the two lads hastened to the quarters of the commanding general, and reported. The general was genuinely glad to see them.

"I had about given you up for lost," he said. "But you have arrived in the nick of time. A concerted German advance is expected momentarily, and without the reply you have brought we would have been at a great disadvantage."

Their mission successfully completed, the lads now hunted up Captain Derevaux. They found the young captain in his quarters. He jumped up as the two boys entered, ran hurriedly forward and greeted them effusively.

"Believe me, I am glad to see you again," he exclaimed. "I had made certain I would never see you alive."

"Oh, we are hard to get rid of," replied Hal, with a smile. "I guess we'll continue to stick around for some time yet."

"Well, you don't know how glad I am to see you back safely," continued the Frenchman. "But come in and tell me all about your journey."

For a long time the three talked; and then Hal bethought himself to ask concerning the situation in Liège.

"We are expecting an attack in force at almost

any minute," explained the young captain; "and we are prepared to give a good account of ourselves. In spite of the fact that we are sure to be greatly outnumbered, there is no doubt that we can hold the forts. Of the city itself, I am not so certain, although these Belgians will fight to the last.

"Everything that can be done to strengthen our position has already been done, and all we can do now is to wait for the attack that must come soon. Already the German forces have delayed longer than had been anticipated, but every hour of delay makes our position that much stronger.

"British troops have been landed in France, and French and English both are hurrying to the support of the Belgians. It is impossible for them to arrive in time to take part in the coming fight, but it is the plan of the Belgians to delay the German advance as long as possible. Believe me, the Germans will find the Belgian defense such a stumbling-block as they have not counted upon."

"There is no question that they will fight to the last?" asked Hal.

"Not the slightest," was the reply. "Their resentment of the violation of Belgian neutrality knows no bounds. They will fight to the last drop of blood in them."

"Then I suppose the battle of Liège will be one of the bloodiest in history," declared Chester.

"Undoubtedly," replied the captain; "and, if I mistake not, it is only a matter of hours until it begins. The troops are sleeping on their arms, and at the first word of a German advance the entire Belgian army will be hurled into the battle."

"Do you really believe the Belgians will be able to check the German advance?"

"I do. These great steel forts are practically impregnable. They can successfully withstand the fire of the big German guns for weeks; and for the Germans to try and take them by storm will mean annihilation. But a successful charge would put the city proper into their hands."

"But in that event is there any likelihood of the forts surrendering?"

"I think not. In fact, I am positive of it. But come, boys, we have talked enough, and it is getting late. I guess we would better turn in. There is no telling when we may get to sleep again."

Accordingly, almost fully dressed, the three threw themselves down, and soon were fast asleep.

To Hal and Chester it seemed they had hardly closed their eyes when they were rudely awakened. It was the sound of a cannon that had aroused them,

but for the moment they could not tell what it was.

The boys sat up and rubbed their eyes sleepily. Outside it was light. The gray dawn crept through the entrance, dispelling the shadows of the darkened hut.

"What was it?" cried Chester.

And, even as he spoke, it came again, the heavy boom of a single huge cannon, followed almost immediately by the crash of thousands upon thousands of rifles. The machine and rapid-fire guns broke loose with their leaden messengers of death, and a bugle sounded:

"To arms!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE BATTLE.

CAPTAIN DEREVAUX, who had been sleeping soundly, sprang to his feet, picked up his sword and pistols, and, without even a word to Hal and Chester, dashed from the hut.

"The battle has begun!" cried Hal.

"Come!" exclaimed Chester. "Let's get to some place where we can see. I can't stay here!"

"Nor I!" cried Hal. "Come on!"

The two lads hurried from the hut. As they emerged, a troop of Belgian cavalry swept past them, on the way to the front. The boys followed as rapidly as possible in its wake. Presently they came to a small hill. Climbing to the top, they found they could command a good view of the advancing German columns, which they could see in the distance, and which were even now almost close enough to grapple hand-to-hand with the horsemen swooping down on them.

All along the German front the Belgian cavalry hurled itself upon the advancing foe. They met

with a crash, and horses and riders went down in heaps. For a moment the Germans gave way. For a moment they recoiled, and then they sprang forward again.

The charge of the Belgian cavalry was magnificent, but it was in vain. The German forces pressed onward, and the cavalry was forced back, cutting and slashing as it slowly retreated. Under a withering fire, that suddenly broke out all along the German front, the horsemen fell by hundreds. It was more than flesh and blood could stand. A retreat was sounded, and the cavalry fell back upon its support. But, even as they drew off, there burst from the German front the sharp roar of the mitrailleuse. The German maxims had opened fire. The Belgians fell faster than before.

And now the Germans were ordered to charge. Squadron upon squadron raced over the open ground in a mad dash toward the Belgian line; and as they charged, the rapid-fire guns of the great forts poured forth their answer. Great holes were cut in the German columns, and men and horses were mowed down like chaff.

And still the Germans came on.

Suddenly a fierce rifle fire broke out all along the Belgian front, even as the rapid-firers continued to belch forth their messengers of death.

Men reeled and fell in masses. The Germans wavered, halted, then retreated. A great shout went up from the Belgian lines.

Under the support of their own field batteries, the Germans re-formed for a second charge. As before, the defenders waited until they were close, then poured in a deadly fire. The Germans staggered, then sprang forward. A second volley greeted them, and a second time the Germans wavered, halted and retreated. A third time they charged, with the same result.

All this time a long-range artillery duel was in progress, whatever advantage there was resting with the Belgians. Shot and shell poured into the oncoming solid ranks of the German infantry, cutting greap gaps in their ranks; but these quickly filled up again, and the Germans continued their steady advance.

All this Hal and Chester saw, and more. For they could see, to the left, the successful advance of the enemy, as it moved upon the town of Liège. In vain the Belgians charged upon the advancing line and poured in shot and shell. The Germans came on. To the right the Germans also were pushing slowly, but surely, forward.

"It is terrible! terrible!" said Chester, with a shudder, as he watched men fall right and left.

"Horrible!" agreed Hal. "But come. We must move. It is as Captain Derevaux said. The Belgians will be unable to hold the town. They must retire upon the forts; and we had better retire before them."

The boys descended from their position of vantage and made their way to the nearest fort, which they were allowed to enter upon informing an officer of their connection with the Belgian army, just as the Belgian troops withdrew from their positions in front of the city and fell back upon the forts.

Liège was left at the mercy of the Germans.

For some minutes thereafter there was a lull, as when a great storm dies down, only to begin again with greater fury. The enemy's left wing, which was nearest the fort in which the boys had taken refuge, could be seen forming for a charge, while from the fort a rain of lead continued to fall upon them. Although men were falling on every hand, the Germans formed without the least confusion.

Then came the order for the charge. From five different points the enemy hurled itself forward upon the fort; nor did the hail of lead stop them. Closer and closer they approached, the five sections of cavalry drawing nearer together as they did so, so that when they were within striking dis-

tance they were almost in solid formation. In their rear the infantry, supported by field guns, already had formed for an advance.

The Uhlans must be driven back at all hazards, and an order rang out from the Belgian commander.

There sallied forth a body of Belgian cavalry and the few French that remained of the French Lancers who had borne the brunt of the fighting in the battle in which Hal and Chester had distinguished themselves. In the center of these Hal and Chester recognized Captain Derevaux, his sword flashing aloft.

"He is a grand soldier!" whispered Hal to Chester softly. "A brave man, indeed. France may well be proud of him!"

"There can be none better," answered Chester. "May he come through the battle safely!"

Now the Belgians and French charged, and the fighting was hand-to-hand, while over the struggling horsemen the guns from the fort poured death into the ranks of the advancing German infantry.

The cavalry of the two armies had met so close to the fort that, with a glass he picked up, Hal could distinguish the faces of the combatants. And again, so close was the fighting that the guns of

the fort could not be brought to bear on the German cavalry for fear of killing friend as well as foe; but they continued to deal death to the infantry.

Looking through his glass, Hal sought out the form of Captain Derevaux. Finally he espied him, right where the fighting was fiercest and men dropped fastest.

Hither and thither rode the gallant young Frenchman, striking, thrusting, parrying, now raising his revolver for a snap shot, the while urging his men on.

"If he gets out alive it will be a miracle!" cried Hal, passing the glass to Chester.

Chester put the glass to his eyes and looked toward the field of battle.

"By Jove!" he muttered. "He is magnificent!"

At that moment the captain's horse went down, but, with a quick movement of his arm, guarding his head from a saber stroke, the young Frenchman seized the bridle of a riderless animal, and with a single movement swung himself to the back of his new charger. In another moment he was once more in the middle of the fighting, dealing out death on every hand.

The Germans gave way, slowly at first, then faster; and at length they turned and fled. As

they did so, the guns from the fort poured a hail of lead into them, mowing them down as they retreated. The Belgian cavalry retired to the support of the fort. The German charge had failed!

And now messages filtered in from other parts of the field. The Belgians had been successful all along the line, with the exception of one point, which had permitted the Germans to enter the city of Liège. The losses of the Germans had been appalling; those of the Belgians comparatively light.

"Can the Belgians fight?" asked Hal, when the Germans had withdrawn. "Can they fight? Well——"

His silence was more expressive than words.

"It's too bad we were unable to take part in the battle," declared Chester. "It certainly gives me a restless feeling to sit here and look on while others are doing all the fighting."

"It does make a fellow feel a little queer," Hal replied. "But, supposing we had been in that charge—where would we be now?"

Chester shrugged his shoulders.

"Perhaps here, and then again—perhaps, some place else," he answered. "Who knows?"

"Neither you nor I, surely," replied Hal. "But

think of the dead and dying on the field out there. War is a terrible thing!"

"It is," declared Chester; "and the more I see of it the more I realize that fact. But come. Let us see if we can find the captain."

It was almost an hour later before they accidentally ran across him, and the young Frenchman carried his arm in a sling.

"It looks as though I am likely to be on the hospital list for a few days," said the captain, smilingly.

"It's a wonder to me your name is not on the death list," replied Chester.

"Indeed it is," agreed Hal. "We watched you through a glass from the fort. Your action was magnificent. France can well be proud of you. Believe me, you will not remain a captain long."

"As for that," replied the young Frenchman, "I have just learned that I have been recommended for promotion."

The boys congratulated him, but he waved them aside laughingly.

"It is no more than you would do for your own America," he declared; "no, nor no more than you both did only the other day. Whatever I do," he added softly, "I do for France!"

CHAPTER XIX.

THE DEATH OF A HERO.

For almost a week now the strong Liège fortresses had withstood the fierce bombardment of the great German guns. Attack after attack had been beaten back, with heavy losses to both sides. Time after time the German cavalry had charged, only to be hurled back by the fierce and deadly fire of the Belgians.

But the forts had not gone unscathed. The heavy German guns had done great damage to the fortifications behind which Hal and Chester had taken shelter, and the possibility was now being seriously considered as to whether the fort could withstand another assault.

General Simon, the commander of the fort, had decided in his own mind to blow it up rather than surrender it to the enemy. Many prisoners had been captured by the defenders, and these crowded the fort, occupying every inch of available space. And now the next assault of the Germans was at hand.

Day and night the bombardment of the fort had continued. Under the protection of the heavy cannonading, the Germans moved once more to the attack. Three times did the enemy charge heroically, and as many times were they driven back, with fearful losses. With the fall of darkness they had given up the attempt to take the fort by storm.

But the Belgian commander knew that the Germans would come again on the morrow; and he also knew that he could not hold forth against them. He made his plans accordingly.

Under cover of the darkness he had his prisoners marched to the nearest fort, more than a mile away. Then he ordered all civilians to the safety of the other fortifications.

His plans for keeping his fortifications from falling into the hands of the enemy already made, he set about fulfilling them. He examined the magazine and had everything in readiness. Then he ordered all his troops to report to the general commanding the nearest fortress, placed a fuse to the magazine, lighted it, and sat down to wait.

Hal and Chester, strolling about the fort, in some unaccountable manner had been left behind. Suddenly, for the first time, they noted the utter desolation of the place.

"Strange," muttered Hal. "Where has everyone gone?"

"You've got me," declared Chester. "but there must be someone around some place. Let's go up to the general's quarters."

Now, when the soldiers and civilians had been ordered to leave the fort, no one knew it was General Simon's intention of blowing it up. They thought he was abandoning it because he believed it no longer capable of resistance. But the commander had planned more deeply and heroically. He did not intend the fort to fall into the hands of the enemy, that they might repair it and turn its guns against his countrymen.

"A German flag shall never wave over this fort," he had muttered to himself.

The general was sitting calmly at his desk, awaiting the end, when the lads entered his room. He sprang to his feet with an exclamation.

"Leave the fort instantly!" he commanded. "Waste a moment and you are as good as dead!"

Hal and Chester stared at him in surprise.

"I have fired the magazine, and the fort will be blown to pieces in a few minutes," said the general hastily. "Fly for your lives!"

"But you, general?" demanded Hal, quietly.

"I? I shall die at my post! But go, instantly! You have not a moment to lose!"

"We shall go when you do, general!" said Chester.

The old commander whipped a revolver from the table before him. He leveled the weapon at Hal.

"If you do not go immediately, I shall fire!" he threatened.

Hal smiled.

"The result would be no different than that of the explosion," he said quietly. "Come with us. We have still a chance of escape."

The general lowered his pistol.

"You are right," he said. "But here," a sudden thought having come to him. "I have still a message for the Belgian people."

He sat down and wrote rapidly. Rising, he handed Hal a paper.

"See that this reaches the commander of Fort No. 5!" he ordered. "You have my command! See that it is carried out! Go!"

"That is simply a ruse to get rid of us, general," said Chester.

The general whirled upon him.

"I am still the commander of this fort!" he cried. Obey my command!"

The boys saluted the gallant old general for the last time; then they turned on their heels and left him, alone.

Once out of his room, they ran for the outer wall of the fortification with all speed; and they did not pause until they were far beyond the fort. Still there was no explosion.

"Perhaps when General Simon finds something has gone wrong, he will follow us," said Hal hopefully.

"He is a brave old man," replied Chester. "Let us hope he thinks better of his decision while there is yet time."

But, hardly had the words left his mouth, when there was a terrific roar, followed by a great flash of light. Turning, the boys saw the fort leap into the air as though it were some live thing. High in the air it burst and spread like a huge skyrocket; and then for miles around there descended pieces of iron, great lumps of steel, like rain from the heavens.

Great pieces of these fell on all sides of the boys, but, as though by a miracle, they were unharmed.

Hal lifted his cap from his head, and looked for a long time toward the spot where the great fort had stood.

"A brave soldier and a gallant gentleman!" he said finally. "May he rest in peace!"

"Aye!" replied Chester softly. "He has given his life for his country!"

Slowly the boys resumed their walk to the other fortress. Great excitement prevailed. The appalling loss of the great fort, and the unaccountable absence of General Simon were causing great anxiety and speculation. The general belief was that the fort had been destroyed by a German shell.

In Fort No. 5 the boys made their way at once to the quarters of the commander. They were admitted into his presence almost immediately. Silently Hal handed him the last words written by the heroic general. Gravely the commander glanced over the paper; then read aloud to the members of his staff, who surrounded him:

"I regret I have but one life to give for my country!"

Every officer in the room rose and bared his head. There was silence for some minutes; then the commander of the fort said quietly:

"Peace be with him! On the next roll call he shall be marked: 'Absent but accounted for.' He is with the heroes!"

CHAPTER XX.

A RACE FOR LIFE.

Hal and Chester walked slowly along the road. It was just beginning to grow light and the lads were tired out. All night they had been on their journey toward Louvain, carrying a second communication to General Givet from the Belgian commander at Liège.

Unlike their previous trip, the country now was known to be overrun by Germans, and their second mission was much more perilous than had been their first. For this reason they had taken a different route, and so did not pass the farmhouse where Chester had been wounded some days before.

"What is that ahead?" asked Chester suddenly.

Hal strained his eyes, peering into the distance.

"I don't know," he replied.

They continued their advance, and suddenly Chester exclaimed:

"Why, it looks like an old-time provision wagon."

"So it is," replied Hal; "I wonder what it can be doing here?"

As the boys drew nearer they perceived their surmise had been correct. A dilapidated old wagon it was, standing beside the road. To it were hitched two mules. There was not a soul about.

"I thought these things had gone out of date," said Hal, indicating the wagon. "It looks like an old prairie schooner."

"It certainly does," answered Chester. "The only reason I can account for such a relic being in use is that every available vehicle has been impressed into service."

"I suppose that is the reason, but it certainly reminds me of the wild and woolly days we have read about in America. If this is not a regulation prairie schooner, I never saw one."

And indeed it seemed that the lads were right. The wagon was covered with a canvas top, which came down over the back, leaving a little opening in the rear.

"What is the reason we can't get in this thing and ride?" asked Chester.

"I can see none," was Hal's reply. "We might as well do it. Then, too, we can make better time."

Accordingly the lads climbed in, and soon were riding slowly along the road. When about five or

six miles from Louvain, Hal, glancing behind, saw three horsemen approaching.

He grabbed Chester by the arm.

"Look there!" he said, pointing.

"Germans, by George!" exclaimed Chester, who was driving, and he immediately started the mules on a dead run.

"Hold on," said Hal; "maybe they are Belgians."

"No, no," replied Chester. "I know they are Germans!"

"Well," replied Hal, "I am going to see," and, stepping out on the footboard and holding to the side of the wagon, he looked back over the top of the wagon. The horsemen were closer now, and Hal could make out their uniforms.

"They are Germans, aren't they?" asked Chester.

"Yes," replied Hal, "and they are coming like the wind!"

"Well," said Chester, "maybe we can get away. You do what fighting is necessary, and I'll do the driving."

"All right," said Hal. Crawling back in the wagon, he drew his two revolvers, and in response to his command, Chester turned his two pistols over to him also.

Hal had hardly reached his place at the back of the wagon when Chester, between yells to the mules, cried out:

"How far off are they now, Hal?"

Hal answered him as well as he could, and Chester renewed his lashing of the mules and his yelling.

Once more Chester inquired the distance between pursued and pursuing, but, before Hal could answer, two shots were fired from behind, accompanied by a shouted command to halt. The bullets from the rifles passed through the wagon between the two lads, but did no damage; and almost instantly the Germans charged down on them. Three shots rang out as they passed the wagon, but the boys were not touched.

The Germans passed on, and then, circling back, prepared for another charge. Hal had fired at them several times, but, owing to the bumping of the wagon, his shots had not found a mark. But, if the bumping of the wagon had spoiled his aim, it had probably saved the lads' lives, for it made accurate shooting by the Germans impossible.

Down came the Germans again, shooting as they passed by. And again the boys were unharmed. Hal and Chester were now yelling at the top of their voices—why, they never knew.

Hal, crawling to the back end of the wagon and, looking out, saw the Germans ready to charge down on them again. One man, however, was jogging along close behind the wagon, his revolver held in his hand.

As Hal looked out, the German stopped his horse and fired. Hal dodged back sideways. The bullet whizzed through the hole in the canvas in the rear, grazed Hal's head, and struck the back of the seat near Chester. Chester did not even turn, but, with cries and blows, continued to urge the mules on.

As quick as he could, Hal rushed to the hole and fired at his opponent, but failed to hit him. At the same instant another bullet came through the side of the wagon, and struck his revolver, and the weapon fell to the road. Hal dodged back inside.

Then the Germans bore down on them again, firing into the wagon as they passed it. Hal sprang to the front of the wagon. One German had stopped and was taking aim at Chester. Hal raised his revolver, and, taking a snap shot, fired. The bullet went true, and the German fell to the road.

"I've hit one of them, Chester!" called Hal.

"Bully for you!" came back the response, and

Chester continued to ply his whip on the backs of the galloping mules.

Once more the remaining two Germans turned and came back, but this time they did not fire as they passed the wagon. Hal rushed back to the rear of the wagon and looked out. . . . One German rode close behind and to the right of the wagon.

Bracing himself, Hal quickly stuck his revolver through the hole, but before he could fire, the German flopped over on one side of his horse, and all that could be seen of him was his arm around the animal's neck, and from the knee down, one leg.

Hal did not fire, but waited for him to come up —he could almost hit the horse's head with his hand, so closely was he running. Suddenly he saw his enemy's hand move, and he dodged back just in time. A bullet sped past his head.

Up came the German, and Hal stuck his revolver through the hole, and, without taking aim, fired. The ball struck the German in the breast, and, with a cry, he threw up his hands, and toppled from his horse.

"I got another one, Chester!" cried Hal.

"Good!" came the reply, but Chester was too busy to say more.

The bullet with which Hal had disposed of the second German had been his last, and the boys were now without firearms.

Along they bowled, and once more the last German passed the wagon. He had learned the boys were without weapons. But the German now had also disposed of his last cartridge, so the lads were on even terms.

Suddenly Chester called:

"He is crowding the mules off the road!"

It was true. The pursuer was riding close to the mules, trying to push them from the road. The animal on the near side was jumping frantically and gradually pushing the other mule toward the edge of the road.

The German kept close to the mule, in spite of several attempts Hal made to scare him off by pointing his empty revolver at him. The German refused to scare.

Grasping the side of the wagon, Hal took the revolver by the barrel and hurled it at the German. The latter tried to dodge, but it was too late. The revolver struck him in the face, and he fell to the ground.

He was up in a moment, however, and, picking up his sword, was soon in the saddle again; and

a moment later the mules again were being crowded off the road.

The German was within striking distance, but Hal had nothing with which to hit him. His other empty revolvers had already been thrown.

"Hit him with the whip!" he cried to Chester. "Hit him with the whip!"

Chester, suiting the action to the word, simply diverted one of the blows intended for the mules, and struck the German fair across the face.

The whip had a knot on the end of it, to keep it from unraveling, and this knot hit the German in the eye. The German dropped his sword, put his hands to his face, and rubbed his eyes; then, putting spurs to his horse, he made off rapidly over the road which they had come.

The boys now caught the first glimpse of the town of Louvain, and the glad sight of Belgian troops could be discerned—the outposts guarding the town.

Chester let the mules slow down.

"That was some ride," he declared.

"You bet," was Hal's answer. "I thought we were gone that time, sure."

"Well, let's get out and walk the rest of the way," said Chester. "I have had enough of this

riding to last me a lifetime. The wagon jolted so much I must be black and blue all over."

Chester stopped the mules, and the boys climbed to the ground; and, just as they started to resume their walk, Hal sank suddenly to the ground!

CHAPTER XXI.

THROUGH WALLS OF FIRE.

QUICKLY Chester bent over his friend.

"Hal! Hal!" he cried in alarm, shaking him gently. "Tell me where you are hurt!"

He laid his friend's body back gently; then for the first time he noticed that blood flowed from a wound in Hal's side.

In vain did Chester try to bring his chum back to consciousness. The boy lay like one dead. Finally, seeing that his efforts to revive his companion were useless, Chester picked him up in his arms, and in this manner started for the town.

By pure grit Chester succeeded in carrying his burden to the Belgian outposts, where he turned him over to a Red Cross surgeon.

"Is he badly hurt?" the boy demanded, as the surgeon arose from examining his chum's wound. "Will he live?"

"It is dangerous," was the reply. "But I think he will come around all right presently. But he has had a narrow escape. One inch higher up and

the bullet would have pierced his heart. He must be taken to the hospital. He must have proper attention."

Leaving his chum in good hands, Chester made his way to General Givet's tent, where he gave him the message the boys had gone through so much to deliver safely. Then he went to the hospital. He was permitted to see his friend at once.

Deathly pale, but with a smile on his face, Hal greeted his friend. Chester sprang forward and grasped his hand.

"Are you all right, old fellow?" he asked eagerly.

"Fit as a fiddle," was the faint reply.

"Why didn't you tell me you were wounded?"

"To tell the truth, I didn't know it myself until just as I stepped from the wagon. I can't remember when the bullet hit me, but I suppose it was when the Germans fired through the side of the wagon. But it was weak of me to give way as I did."

"Weak! Great Scott! Even the surgeon is unable to see how you held out as long as you did. You have had a mighty narrow escape, I can tell you!"

"I guess I have," replied Hal feebly. "But any-

how it's an escape. Did you deliver the letter to General Givet?"

"Yes."

At this juncture, a nurse approached.

"You must go now," she told Chester. "Your friend must have perfect quiet for the remainder of the day."

"All right," replied Chester, and then turning to Hal:

"Well, good-by, old man. I'll be here the first thing in the morning."

"Good-by," replied Hal. "Now, don't you worry about me. I shall be all right."

Chester made his way from the hospital.

"By George!" he muttered, as he walked down the street. "I wish it had been me that was wounded instead of good old Hal. It's certainly tough on him, but he sure does bear up bravely."

As Chester continued down the street, he was brought to a sudden halt by the sound of firing from the outskirts of the city; and a moment later a mounted officer dashed through the street, shouting:

"The Germans! The Germans are approaching!"

People along the street took up the cry and the air was filled with the sound of startled voices:

"The Germans! The Germans!"

Dashing squadrons of cavalry swept through the streets on their way to the front; people jumped out of the way as the artillery was hurried by; and then came columns upon columns of infantry on a quick run.

It was plainly evident that an attack by the Germans had not been anticipated; but now that the enemy was close at hand, everything possible was being done for the defense of the city.

Chester hurried in the wake of the troops, and, as he did so, the first screaming shell burst over his head. He was hurled to the ground, but escaped injury. The crowds that had thronged the streets a moment before vanished as if by magic.

The flying shells now screamed incessantly overhead. From the front came the deafening roar of many guns, and the crash of thousands upon thousands of rifles. Suddenly the screams of many voices rose, as a building, not far from where Chester stood, was blown into a million pieces.

For a moment Chester was awe-stricken and stood still.

"This is terrible!" he muttered to himself. "Terrible!"

He was struck by a sudden thought.

"Suppose one of those shells should strike the

hospital?" he said to himself. "What would happen then? What would happen to Hal?"

Turning, he hurried back in the direction from which he had come. Was it a premonition, or what?

As he turned the corner and the hospital came into view, a horrible scene met his eyes.

The hospital was afire! A brilliant flame shot high into the air, and the smoke poured forth in a dense volume. Even from where he stood Chester could see that one wall of the hospital had fallen. It had crumbled under the shock of a German shell.

Chester dashed forward; nor did he pause or falter at the thought of the dangers he would encounter in the burning building, but ran rapidly up the steps and plunged into the dense cloud of smoke and the sheet of flame.

His sense of direction stood him in good stead now. Almost stifled, his hands and face scorched by the intense heat, he ran up the stairs. At the top, where the air was somewhat clearer, he paused for a moment for breath, then dashed for the room where he knew Hal lay.

Hal was sitting on the edge of the bed when Chester burst into the room. He had noted the first signs of smoke, and had attempted to rise,

but the effort was beyond him. There was not another soul in the room.

He looked up as Chester rushed in.

"I am afraid I can't make it," he said, in a faint voice.

"We have got to make it," replied Chester quickly. "Can you walk at all?"

Hal shook his head.

"I tried to," he said, "but I can hardly stand on my feet."

"Put your arm about my shoulder!" commanded Chester.

"It's no use," said Hal. "You can't possibly carry me out, and we shall both perish. Save yourself while you have time!"

"No more talk like that," commanded Chester, in a stern voice. "We go or stay together."

"But we cannot do it," replied Hal. "Alone you may make it; but with me you are certain to perish. Go!"

"Will you do as I tell you peaceably, or must I use force?" demanded Chester. "If you don't obey me, so help me, I will knock you cold and then carry you out. Come, which shall it be?"

"Have your own way, then," said Hal.

Chester stooped over and Hal put his arm about his neck; then, lifting him up in his arms, Chester

staggered through the doorway, and to the staircase.

But, as he was about to put his foot on the first step, there was a terrible rumble and roar, and the steps crashed downward. The supports had been burned away.

By a mighty effort Chester regained his balance, and the two lads were saved from death in the smoking ruins below by a hair's breadth. Turning, Chester rushed toward a window and looked out. It was a long drop to the ground below, and he saw no help in sight.

"I told you it was no use," said Hal. "Let me go, and save yourself!"

Chester did not reply, but laid his chum gently on the floor. Then he dashed into the next room, returning in a moment with several sheets.

Quickly he tore these into strips and tied them together. Then he approached Hal and tied one end under his arms.

"We will get out yet," he said quietly, and assisted Hal to the window.

"Put no more strain upon your wound than necessary," he instructed Hal. "Hold to the sheets with your hands, and it will relieve some of the strain."

So saying, Chester lifted Hal to the window sill,

and gently lowered him over the edge. With his feet braced against the wall, he paid out the improvised rope slowly.

Now the flames burst into the room in which Chester stood, but it did not hasten the lad in his desperate work. Slowly he let the sheets slip through his hands, that Hal's wound might not be opened afresh by any sudden jerks; and presently the slack of the rope told him that his chum had reached the ground. At the same moment he heard Hal's voice:

"All right! Pull up the rope!"

Rapidly now Chester set about saving himself. The room was a seething mass of flames, which burned him terribly. Tying one end of his improvised rope to a bedpost, Chester leaped to the window sill, and began his descent.

So fierce were the flames that the sheets lasted but a second; but, in that time Chester had slid halfway to the ground. Then the rope broke and he fell with a crash. He picked himself up immediately, however, and, turning to Hal, said swiftly:

"Quick! We must get away from here at once. The building is likely to fall at any moment and we shall be buried beneath it."

He stooped down.

"Put your arms around my neck again!" he commanded.

Hal obeyed, this time without question.

Raising up with Hal in his arms, Chester staggered forward at a run, and it was well that he did so.

For at the moment he had reached a place of safety, the great building caved in with a deafening crash. There was a roar like the roar of a thousand guns, and, a moment later, on the spot where the hospital had stood there was only a mass of smoking and blazing débris.

More slowly, now, Chester continued on his way. Before him he could still hear the thundering of many cannons as the battle progressed, but he kept his face turned in that direction.

In spite of the heavy burden in his arms, he made good progress; nor did the bursting of an occasional shell nearby deter him, nor turn him from his course. As he staggered along he passed many tumbled-down buildings that gave evidence of the accuracy of the fire of the German gunners; and in some places the bodies of non-combatants littered the streets.

Straight toward the front went Chester, his face set in grim determination. He realized that in that direction lay whatever chance there was of

safety; for even now his keen ears detected the sound of firing from the rear, as the Germans made their attack from that direction.

But, even as Chester neared the outskirts of the city a great cheer rang out from in front, and the sound of firing grew less distinct. Presently troops began to come toward them. Victorious in front, they were now hurrying through the city to drive off the enemy attacking from the other side.

Chester stopped and laid Hal down in a doorway. There the two lads remained in silence for some time. Soon the sound of firing from the other directions grew more faint; then ceased altogether.

Chester put Hal in the care of a pleasant-faced Belgian woman, who came to the door now that the battle was over, and went forth in search of General Givet. The latter was about ready to give himself up to a much-needed rest, but permitted Chester to enter his hut.

"General," said Chester, passing over how he had saved Hal's life in the hospital fire, "my friend is badly wounded, and is in a bad way. It will be long before he recovers. I have come to ask if there is not some way in which he can be sent out of the country, at least until he has entirely recovered."

The general considered.

"There is a party leaving for Brussels to-morrow," he said finally. "You both may go with them."

"But it is not necessary for me to go," returned Chester. "I might be of use to you here."

"Would you not like to be with your friend?" asked the general.

"I would like nothing better," replied Chester.

"Then it shall be so," said the general. "You are both brave lads. I shall make the necessary arrangements myself."

Chester was in the best of spirits as he made his way from the general's quarters and started down the street to where he had left his wounded chum. The lad was walking slowly along, when his arm was seized from behind. Turning, Chester beheld the face of Edna Johnson.

"Why, how do you do!" exclaimed Chester, raising his cap. "This certainly is a surprise. What are you doing in Louvain? I thought you had decided to remain at the farmhouse. But what is the matter?"

This last was called forth by the signs of distress and excitement plainly visible on the girl's face, which Chester, in his pleasure at seeing her again, had not perceived at first.

"I am staying here with a friend," the girl explained rapidly. "My uncle ordered me to leave the farmhouse and come here. I am indeed fortunate to have encountered you."

"Why?" demanded Chester.

"Listen," said the girl. And, taking Chester by the arm, she bent close to him and whispered:

"In my friend's home there are two men, presumably civilians. But I know better. I heard them plotting. They are going to send word to the German commander, telling him the exact position of the Belgian troops, the weak spots in the defense, and all other details."

"What!" exclaimed Chester. "Spies right here in the midst of the Belgian army?"

"Yes," replied the girl. "I overheard them talking in the room next to mine. I didn't stop to hear any more. I ran out of the house, and was on my way to the general, when I saw you. Then I thought I had better tell you what I had learned."

"And I am glad you told me!" said Chester. "Come, lead me to the house and I shall try and gather fuller details before reporting to the general. It may be that there are other spies in the city, and that, by listening, I can learn something concerning them."

Chester for the moment put aside all thoughts

of Hal. He considered it his first duty to serve the country for which he had already gone through so much. Hal was in good hands. So, walking slowly, Chester and Edna made their way to the house where the girl was living.

"I am not particularly fond of playing eavesdropper," Chester told the girl, as he stealthily followed her up the stairs; "but it is all in the line of duty, so I guess it is up to me."

From Miss Johnson's room could be heard the subdued sounds of voices in the next room.

"Rather unthoughtful of them to discuss such business in such a place, to say the least," remarked Chester. "Apparently they forget that even the walls have ears."

The lad laid his ear to the door between the two rooms. Edna stood close behind him, and the two listened eagerly.

"Well, then it is all settled," came a low voice from the room beyond. "You report to the chief immediately. I'll remain here an hour, so that we shall not arouse suspicion by going together. But tell the chief I shall be on hand in time."

"Good!" came the reply. "I suppose all other details have been attended to and that the thing will be pulled off smoothly. To-morrow night should see the end of Louvain."

Chester straightened up.

"I must get out of the house before he does," he told the girl. "I must follow him."

"But won't you be in danger?" protested Edna. "Why not report to the general at once?"

"No," the lad declared. "I must at least find the rendezvous."

Quickly he slipped from the room, and stepped outside the front door just as a door on the upper floor slammed to.

Chester walked slowly down the street, whistling.

"I hope he comes this way," he told himself. "Otherwise, I shall have to do some fast walking."

Fortune favored the boy. As he walked slowly along, a man brushed swiftly past him. Taking care to avoid all pretense of pursuit, Chester followed.

CHAPTER XXII.

CHESTER DISCOVERS A PLOT.

For half an hour the lad stalked his prey through the streets of the city, winding about here and there until Chester had absolutely lost his sense of direction. Several times the man turned round and glanced furtively about, but apparently he took no notice of his shadow.

Finally he turned into a crooked little street near the outskirts of the city. Chester also turned the corner, just in time to see the man descend a pair of steps into the basement of what was apparently an unoccupied house.

The lad hurried up and arrived in time to hear the man give a peculiar knock at the door—one loud tap, followed by three soft taps, then another loud one.

Chester walked back around the corner, where he stopped to think.

"If only I could get in there," he said to himself. "I wonder——"

He stopped, struck by a sudden idea.

"By Jove! I believe it can be done," he said.

He continued to pace up and down, apparently deep in thought. Occasionally he stopped to look in the direction from which he had followed his prey to the rendezvous.

After nearly an hour the lad, after a glance down the street, slipped quietly into a doorway. Apparently the thing for which he had been waiting was about to come to pass.

Footsteps sounded on the street, coming closer. Save for the one lone pedestrian, the street was deserted. The footsteps approached closer, and Chester gathered himself for a spring. As the man came abreast of the doorway in which the lad was hiding, Chester hurled himself upon him. With one hand the lad clutched his victim about the throat, and with the other he struck out heavily. There was a stifled groan, and the man fell limp in the boy's arms.

Glancing hurriedly about to see that there was no one in sight—no witness to his deed—Chester dragged the man into the doorway. Here he quickly discarded his own clothes, stripped the stranger of his outer garments and donned them himself.

Then tearing his own clothes into strips, he bound his victim and gagged him, after which, now attired

in his victim's clothes, he stood up and made a search of the pockets.

"If my surmise is correct," he said to himself, "I shall be all right."

The hand which was exploring the inside breast pocket came forth with a little piece of cloth.

"Good!" the lad exclaimed. "I thought as much. I didn't believe they would take too many chances. A stranger might get in and betray them."

For the little piece of cloth the lad had taken from the pocket of his newly acquired apparel was a black mask.

"Now," said the boy to himself, "to see if I cannot find out who I am supposed to be."

He continued the search of the pockets. Several pieces of paper and one or two documents he glanced at hurriedly, and restored. Finally he drew out a paper that seemed to please him, for his face lighted up with a smile. He glanced at the slip of paper and read aloud:

"This is to certify that the bearer is an accredited agent of the One King."

At the bottom was a seal of peculiar design, but there was no signatnre.

"Evidently," said the lad, "members of this gang are not known to one another, at least all of them.

They may spot me and they may not. However, I've got to take a chance. Nothing risked, nothing gained."

The lad stepped quickly from his place of concealment and approached where the man he had followed had turned in more than an hour before. He descended the steps into the basement and knocked upon the door—once loudly, three times softly, and once loudly again.

The door swung open before him, and a masked man peered out. Taking a deep breath, and feeling in his pocket to make sure that his revolver was in readiness, the lad stepped inside. The door swung to behind him.

Chester followed the man who had opened the door down a dark hallway, and into a dimly lighted room. Masked as he was, the boy had little fear of being discovered, but his hand rested on his automatic in his right-hand coat pocket.

Inside the room Chester perceived a circle of dark faces, stretching almost around the room. At one side, facing the circle, was a raised platform, and on this sat a huge bulk of a man, masked, as were all the others.

They all rose as Chester entered the room, and without a word the boy made his way to the one vacant seat. The conspirators then resumed their

seats, and Chester sat down also, four chairs away from where the chief himself sat.

"Number One," called the chief, and the man nearest him on Chester's side arose. "What have you to report?"

"Everything is ready, sir. As you know, I am on the staff of the Belgian commander. With the information I shall impart to him at the proper time to-morrow, the main force of Belgian troops will be withdrawn from the northern part of the city and the surprise will be complete."

"You are sure? There is no chance of failure?"

"Not the slightest, sir."

"Good!" said the chief, and the first man resumed his seat.

"Number Two," called the chief, and the second man arose.

By his first words Chester recognized the man who had first spoken at the home of Edna Johnson.

"And what have you to report?" demanded the chief.

"That word has been sent to attack at five o'clock," was the reply. "I have received an answer, showing that my message was delivered without mishap."

"Good!" boomed the chief again. "That is all."

Number Two resumed his seat.

"Number Three!" called the chief.

The man next to Chester rose to his feet.

"Your report," commanded the chief.

"I have to report, sir, that the thousand men sent to me have all arrived. They came singly, and the last one arrived shortly before I came here. They are all armed and are quartered in vacant houses on Brussels Street, at the southern extremity of the city. They are awaiting the word."

The chief nodded, and the third man sat down.

"Number Four!" called the chief.

Chester rose to his feet, as had the others.

"And you, sir?" demanded the chief. "Is your report satisfactory?"

Chester was thinking rapidly. He was in the most ticklish situation he had ever faced, and he was fully aware of it. He knew now that there was not one chance in a thousand of his escaping detection. But the lad did not falter, and his right hand grasped the handle of his automatic more firmly, as he made reply:

"Entirely so, sir," and then paused.

"Well, well!" shouted the chief. "Explain!"

Chester drew a deep breath, and took a haphazard shot:

"My men are ready to seize the entire Belgian staff, at a moment's notice, sir."

The confusion that broke out immediately following his words told Chester that his shot had missed. But the boy stood his ground. There was nothing else he could do.

From the opposite side of the room came a cry:

"That was the work assigned to me."

"That is not true," was Chester's quick reply. "I was the man selected for that work."

The man on the other side of the room made a spring toward Chester, but he was arrested by the commanding voice of the chief, who now stood up to his full height, a revolver barrel gleaming in his outstretched hand.

"There is a traitor here," said the chief calmly. "I shall be the one to decide who it is, for you are all known to me. Unmask!"

Every person in the room save Chester obeyed this command, and for the fraction of a second he stood alone, his face still covered. But he stood for a fraction of a second only.

Then with a quick move his revolver leaped from his pocket, and there was the sound of a shot. The chief toppled over to the floor.

Chester leaped to one side, and with a backward sweep of his left arm knocked the single lamp from the wall and plunged the room into darkness.

Then he dropped to his knees. And none too

soon, for twenty pistols cracked and as many bullets went hurtling by the spot where he had stood a moment before.

Ten feet behind Chester was a door. He had noticed it when he first entered the room, and had decided that there lay whatever chance he had for safety should he be discovered. Quickly, and still stooping, he ran toward the door.

And even as he reached it a match flared up and a bullet whistled by his ear. But the door was unlocked and gave before the boy's weight, and as, after passing safely through it, he turned to close it in the faces of his enemies, one man blocked him, his arm raised to fire.

But Chester's revolver rang out first. The lad had fired from his hip, and the man went sprawling.

The lad turned his weapon on the others who now rushed toward him, and fired three rapid shots. Then he slammed the door shut, bolted it with a single movement, and, turning, ran along the dark passageway, at the end of which he could discern a dim light.

Chester wiped his brow with his hand, and his hand came away wet. Holding it close to his eyes as he ran, Chester saw blood. A bullet had struck him a glancing blow on the side of the head, but in

the excitement of the moment he had not realized that he was wounded.

At the end of the passageway the lad emerged into another room. There was not a window in the room, and, glancing hurriedly about, Chester espied a pair of stairs. Quickly he leaped up these, and came into what apparently at one time had been a kitchen.

The boy's gaze roved hastily about for a means of exit. He tried the door, but it was locked. Twice he threw his whole weight against it, but it did not budge. He looked at the windows. For some reason, they were heavily barred.

Chester put the muzzle of his automatic to the keyhole of the door and fired. The lock was blown entirely away, and the door flew open beneath the lad's weight.

Not hesitating, the lad leaped through the next room and sped into the hall beyond. He could clearly see that his way now led to the front door, and he made for it at a run. He grasped the knob and gave a quick wrench, but the door would not open.

He sought for the key to turn it, but there was no key. Evidently the family, upon going away, had barred it from the outside. From behind, the boy could hear the sound of rapidly approaching foot-

steps, and he knew that every moment's delay spelled disaster and almost certain death.

He picked up a chair, and with a single blow shattered the glass front of the door. He drew the leg of the chair across the ragged pieces of glass left at the bottom, and then, dropping the chair, drew himself up.

Just as he was about to tumble out on the far side, four men dashed up the steps with drawn revolvers. Chester took in the situation at a glance. He was between two fires, and escape was impossible.

"Well," he told himself quietly, "I guess it's all up with me this time."

He dropped back inside and faced his pursuers. Throwing his now useless revolver to the floor, he raised both hands.

"I surrender," he said quietly.

CHAPTER XXIII.

AT THE POINT OF DEATH.

Two of Chester's pursuers approached him warily with leveled revolvers, apparently fearing a trick. Coming within striking distance, one of them dealt the lad a heavy blow with his fist. Chester fell to the floor without so much as a groan, unconscious.

When the lad again opened his eyes he was once more in the council chamber of the conspirators. In the dim light he could discern the masked circle of faces that had gazed at him when he had entered the room for the first time. The only difference being that there was here and there a vacant chair.

Chester recovered consciousness fully alert to what was going on about him. He took in the situation at a glance, and a grim smile lighted up his face as his eyes fell upon the vacant chairs.

"Looks like I had done a fair job, at any rate," he told himself.

His gaze turned toward the chief's platform. The

chief was there, but his head was swathed in bandages.

"Too bad I missed him!" Chester muttered. "He is evidently the ring-leader, and to have downed him would have been the proper thing."

Any further reflections the lad might have had were interrupted by the booming voice of the chief, who now rose to his feet.

"Prisoner, stand up!" he commanded.

Chester arose from the chair in which he had been seated. His arms were bound behind him and his feet had been tied together; still he found that he could stand.

"Prisoner," continued the chief, "your name!"

"Chester Crawford," was the lad's firm reply.

"And what are you doing in Belgium in these troublous days?"

"I am attached to the staff of the Belgian commander at Liège," was the boy's prompt response.

"But what are you doing in Louvain?"

"I came here with dispatches."

"So? And yet you are not a Belgian, I take it; nor yet, French. What, then? An Englishman?"

"No; I am an American," said Chester proudly.

"An American! Then how comes it that you are fighting for the enemies of Germany?"

"I am proud to be fighting for what I consider the right," said Chester simply.

"The right!" exclaimed the chief, in a loud voice. "Well, you shall soon see that you would have been better off had you stayed on the other side of the Atlantic."

Chester did not reply.

"Do you know what we are going to do with you?" continued the chief.

"No, and I don't care," was the lad's reply.

"We are going to kill you," said the chief calmly. "But first you will be given a hearing. We do not put even our enemies to death without a fair trial."

Chester laughed mockingly.

"A fair trial by such as you?" he exclaimed. "That is a joke. But go ahead with the farce, and let's have it over with as soon as possible."

The reply was a subdued growl.

"Why are you here, in this room?" he demanded, at length.

"To learn the details of a plot that would deliver Louvain into the hands of its enemies," replied Chester calmly.

"How did you learn our rendezvous?"

"By listening to the conversation of two of your members who were so indiscreet as not to remember that the walls of their room might have ears."

"So? That shall be looked into. Such indiscretion is not to be tolerated. But how comes it that you were able to discover the knock of admittance; how comes it that you have a mask exactly like the rest of us?"

"You are asking a good many questions," said Chester, "but as this probably is my finish, I don't mind telling you. I followed one of your members here, and overheard him knock. Then I waylaid the other and took his mask, clothes, and credentials away from him."

The chief looked at him in surprise.

"And you a mere boy," he exclaimed. "You are a bold lad and 'tis a pity you have fallen into our hands. But that is enough. You admit, then, that you entered here to spy upon us?"

"Certainly, with the greatest of pleasure," said Chester. "Why shouldn't I admit it?"

"Enough!" cried the chief, and turned to his men.

"You have heard the confession of the prisoner," he said. "Number One, what is your verdict?"

"Guilty!" replied Number One, in a solemn voice.

"Number Two?" called the chief.

"Guilty!" was the reply.

And so on all down the line. Each answer was

the same. And when each plotter had given his verdict, the chief addressed them all in a loud voice.

"And the penalty?" he questioned. "What shall the penalty be?"

And each man answered as with one voice:

"Death!"

"Good!" said the chief. "So be it."

He turned to Chester.

"Prisoner," he said, "you have heard the verdict. Have you anything further to say?"

"Nothing," said Chester quietly. "What's the use?"

"Then," said the chief, turning to the rest of the conspirators, "you shall draw lots to determine the executioner."

He opened a small box that was on the table, rose to his feet, and held the box out at arm's length.

"You will come forward, one at a time," he told his fellow-plotters, "and let not one of you look at the ball you have drawn until each man has taken a ball and returned to his seat. Number One!"

Number One stepped forward, reached in the box and extracted a ball, which he carefully concealed in his hand, and returned to his seat. Each man stepped forward in turn, and then returned to his

chair, with a ball in his hand. Then the chief spoke again.

"Who has the red ball?" he demanded.

Each man looked at the ball he had drawn, and then a voice at the opposite end of the room from Chester rang out:

"I have it!"

"Good!" exclaimed the chief once more. "Then the prisoner's fate shall be left in your hands. You may dispose of him in whatever manner you desire. But"—and he raised a warning finger—"see that you make no slip." He turned to the rest of the conspirators. "The rest of you may go."

Slowly the conspirators, at intervals of perhaps a minute each, filed from the room, and soon there was no one left save Chester, his executioner, and the chief.

"Remember," said the chief to the one remaining conspirator, as he prepared to take his departure, "remember that a failure to carry out the command of the court-martial means your own death."

"Have no fear," replied the executioner. "He shall not escape."

The chief nodded and left without another word.

A moment the executioner stood, looking after the chief's retreating figure. Then he drew a revolver from his pocket and approached Chester.

Chester's heart began to thump loudly, and, try as he would, he could not but tremble.

"This is the finish, all right," he told himself.

He closed his eyes and uttered a short prayer.

A hand fell on his shoulder and shook him. The lad opened his eyes. The executioner stood over him, revolver in hand.

"You are an enemy of my country," said the executioner, "and I should kill you. But I can't do it. You spared my life once, and it is impossible that I kill you now."

Chester's heart beat rapidly. Could it be that he was once again to escape death when he was sure that his last moment had come? But he replied in a steady voice:

"I saved your life? Where? When?"

With a quick move the man lifted his mask from his face.

"Do you remember now?" he demanded.

The face was that of the man with whom Hal had fought in the farmhouse—the home of Edna Johnson—some days before. Chester recognized him immediately as the German officer who had led his men to the attack in the farmhouse.

But Chester had not spared the man's life. He had not even fought with him. It was Hal who had refused to give the German his death-thrust

when the latter was at his mercy. Chester thought quickly.

"He has mistaken me for Hal," he told himself, "and if he knew it he would probably kill me at once. I must keep up the game."

He replied to the German's question:

"Yes, I do remember you now."

"Then you see why it is I cannot kill you," said the German; "bnt neither can I let you go free. For if I did you would consider it your duty to inform the Belgian commander of what you have learned and thus frustrate our plans. I don't know what to do with you."

Chester made no reply, and the captain continued:

"I can think of but one thing, and that is to keep you with me until the Germans have taken Louvain, after which, in some manner, I shall see that you reach the Belgian lines safely. But we shall have to be very careful as we leave here. The chief may have stationed a guard, and if he should learn that I have not killed you, my own life would pay the forfeit. But come, we must act quickly."

So saying, the German stooped over Chester and cut his bonds. The lad rose to his feet and stretched himself. For a moment he considered the advisability of leaping upon his captor-friend, wrenching his revolver from him, and making his escape. But

this plan he immediately put aside as unwise, for his captor still held the weapon ready, and the boy knew that a single false move and the German would fire. Therefore, he did as his captor bade him.

The German raised his revolver in the air and fired a single shot.

"If anyone remained to see whether the execution was carried out, that will probably convince him," he said. "Now I will go out the door, and do you follow in sixty seconds. I shall be watching, and if you try to escape I shall kill you."

The German peered out through the door, and a moment later was on the outside. For a moment Chester debated whether he should make a dash in the other direction. A little reflection, however, and he decided he had better not. His limbs were cramped from being tightly bound, and he knew that should he not make his appearance as commanded by the German within sixty seconds, the latter would come after him—and the latter was armed and Chester was not.

Slowly he counted off the sixty seconds, and then stepped through the door.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"OUT OF THE FRYING PAN——"

"THIS way," came a low voice, as the lad reached the top of the steps.

It was now after nightfall, and the street was very dark, but Chester could dimly make out the form of the officer a few yards ahead of him.

"Follow me," came the voice again, "and remember that I have my gun ready. Just so surely as you make a false move I will kill you."

Chester made no reply, but followed his captor down the street. At the first corner the officer stopped and allowed Chester to come up with him.

"I guess we can walk along together now," he said, as they turned the corner. "It is hardly likely that they suspect me."

"I am sure I can never thank you enough," said Chester fervently.

"Never mind that," said the German. "I don't want any thanks. But it is a poor gentleman who cannot return a favor."

The two continued their way in silence. They came at length to a little house, setting well back on

a dimly lighted street, and here the German turned in, Chester accompanying him. The officer let himself into the house with a night key, and the two ascended the stairs, at the top of which the officer led the lad into a small but comfortable room.

"Just make yourself at home," he told Chester. "It isn't much, but it's the best I can offer. Here you will have to stay till after to-morrow night, or at least until we have occupied the city."

From a little cupboard the officer produced some sandwiches and two bottles of beer.

"Help yourself," he said.

"Thanks," said Chester. "I'll try one of the sandwiches, but I don't believe I care for any of the beer."

"What's the matter?" demanded his host. "Don't you drink beer?"

"No," said Chester, "and I don't want to start now."

"Suit yourself," said the German, pouring himself a glass. "Have one of these sandwiches, anyhow."

Chester ate hungrily, for it had been many hours since he had tasted food. The light meal disposed of, the German lighted a cigarette, and the two leaned back for a talk. They discussed various topics for several hours, and then the German said:

"Well, I guess it is time for me to turn in. You will bunk in the corner there," pointing, "and I'll sleep in the other corner. But first I must tie you up. It wouldn't do to have you escape, you know, for in spite of the fact that I am your friend, I am first of all a servant of the Kaiser."

He produced some rope, and soon Chester was once more bound securely, but not uncomfortably. The lad lay down and closed his eyes, and a moment later the German also turned in.

Chester was in no mood for sleep. He had too much on his mind to think of slumber. Several moments more and the deep regular breathing of the officer gave evidence that he was sound asleep.

Chester squirmed and twisted quietly in his bunk, trying to release his hands. Minute after minute he continued with untiring energy. A clock somewhere in the house struck the hour of twelve, and still Chester squirmed and twisted.

As he turned this way and that, straining at his bonds, his left hand suddenly came free. Chester could hardly believe his own senses. A moment later and he had released his feet. Cautiously he arose and peered into the darkness. He could not see an inch before him. The room was absolutely black.

But Chester's sense of direction stood him in good

stead now. Slowly and cautiously he tip-toed toward the spot where he knew the door to be. His outstretched hand touched the wood, and a moment later his exploring fingers found the knob. He found the key and turned it, then slowly and silently turned the knob.

The door swung open without even a creak and in a second more the lad was on the outside and the door was closed behind him. Stealthily he descended the stairs, opened and went out the front door, closing it softly behind him. Then he darted down the street as fast as his legs could carry him.

After rounding several corners, he finally slowed down to a walk. He felt now that he was safe from pursuit, and he set about finding his way to the headquarters of General Givet. He continued his walk for several blocks, and then he was suddenly challenged by a sentry.

The lad explained his mission, received the proper directions, and was soon making all haste toward the general's quarters. Once more before the general's hut, the lad informed the soldier standing guard that he must see the general immediately.

"It is impossible," was the reply. "The general is taking a much-needed rest. He gave orders that he must not be disturbed on any account. But here," suddenly, "here comes Captain Bassil. He will see

that any information you may have reaches the general."

Chester turned to greet the newcomer. He saluted as the latter came up to him. As the officer drew close, he gave one startled look at the boy's face, and then drew back with an exclamation.

"You here?" he exclaimed.

"Why, yes, sir," replied the lad, "and I have important information." To himself he added: "Where have I heard that voice before?"

"What is your information?" demanded the officer harshly.

Briefly and quietly Chester told him what he had learned.

"Impossible!" was the officer's exclamation, when Chester had concluded his recital. "It is my belief that you have come here to spy." He turned to the soldier. "Send Lieutenant Armand to me at once," he said.

The man saluted and disappeared. At the last words of the officer it suddenly came to Chester where he had heard the voice before. He approached the officer and peered more closely into his face.

"I wasn't sure, until I heard your last words," he told him, "but I know you now. You are a German spy."

"Hold your tongue," said the officer harshly, "or I will shoot you down where you stand."

At that moment another officer hurried up and saluted the captain.

"You sent for me, sir?" he asked.

"Yes; this boy is a German spy. I have positive proof. Have him shot at sunrise."

"Very well, sir," replied the lieutenant; then to Chester: "Come!"

"But——" began the lad.

"No words," said the lieutenant. "Forward—march!"

Chester saw it was no use to protest, so he marched ahead of the lieutenant without another word. He was taken to a small tent, thrust in, and a trooper ordered to mount guard over him. Wearily the lad threw himself down, and, in spite of his predicament, was soon asleep.

It was just beginning to grow light when he was rudely awakened by someone shaking him by the arm. Five minutes later and he was marched from his tent between a file of soldiers.

As he walked rapidly along between his captors, he suddenly espied an officer approaching on horseback. Even from where he was, in the dim light Chester recognized the horseman, and his spirits

rose. It was plainly apparent that the rider would pass within a few feet of him.

A moment more, and he was close enough to the mounted officer to touch his horse. Suddenly the lad sprang forward and cried:

"General Givet! General Givet!"

The mounted officer pulled up his horse sharply. At the same moment the officer in charge of the squad sprang forward and grasped Chester roughly by the arm.

"Get back there!" he commanded sharply, but the boy paid no heed.

"General Givet!" he called again, and laughed happily aloud as the general turned his horse and came squarely up to him.

"Why, by my soul!" exclaimed the Belgian commander after a sharp look at the boy, "if it isn't young Crawford! What are you doing here?"

"They are going to shoot me as a spy, general," said Chester.

"What!" exclaimed the commander. "You a spy!"

He turned to the lieutenant in command of the squad.

"By whose order, sir?" he demanded.

"Captain Bassil's order, sir," was the reply.

"Captain Bassil, eh? Well, you will conduct your

prisoner to my quarters. Then you will inform Captain Bassil that I desire his presence immediately."

The lieutenant saluted, and the general rode off.

Ten minutes later, in the general's quarters, Chester was face to face with his accuser.

"Well, sir," said General Givet to Captain Bassil, "what was your reason for ordering this lad shot? You will please explain yourself at once."

The captain shifted uneasily from one foot to another.

"I was sure he was a spy, sir," he made reply. "Why else should he be spooking about your tent at such an hour in the morning? But if I have made a mistake——"

"You have, sir," interrupted the general, "a very serious one—one that will require a more satisfactory explanation than the one you have just given. This lad"—and the general laid his hand on Chester's shoulder—"already has proven himself invaluable to our cause. Had I not fortunately arrived in time, he would now be dead. And in that event it would have fared badly with you. But I must investigate this case farther. Captain Bassil, you will go immediately to your quarters and consider yourself under arrest."

As the captain saluted and turned to leave the

tent, Chester, who had been silent thus far, exclaimed:

"One moment, please, Captain Bassil," and then turned to General Givet. "I will explain, sir," he added, "if you will have Captain Bassil remain a moment longer."

The general nodded and Captain Bassil remained. Chester walked up to him and looked him steadily in the eye for several moments. Then he turned to General Givet and said calmly:

"I accuse Captain Bassil, sir, of being a German spy!"

"What!" exclaimed the Belgian commander, starting back. "Do you realize what you are saying?"

"Perfectly, sir, and I am prepared to prove what I say."

Captain Bassil smiled sneeringly.

"I won't believe you will take any stock in such a wild story, sir," he said to General Givet. "With your permission, I shall go to my own quarters."

"One moment," said the general, raising a detaining hand, and then turned to Chester. "Explain yourself," he added shortly.

In a few well-chosen words Chester recounted his experiences of the day before.

"And I am positive," he concluded, "that if you

will have Captain Bassil searched, you will find in his possession a paper similar to this," and he handed the commander the document he had taken from one of the conspirators before he entered their council chamber.

The commander ran his eye over the paper hurriedly, and turned sternly toward Captain Bassil.

"What have you to say to this charge, sir?" he demanded.

"That it is a lie!" shouted the accused officer. "He is accusing me to save himself."

The general looked at him in silence for some moments, apparently undecided as to how to act.

"Well," he said at length, "it will do no harm to find out."

He stepped to the door of his tent and spoke to the sentinel on duty just outside:

"Ask Lieutenant Armand to step this way at once."

As General Givet turned from giving this command, Captain Bassil suddenly uttered a loud cry and leaped upon the commander.

"At least you shall never live to thwart our plans!" he cried, as he sprang.

Taken completely off his guard, General Givet was hurled heavily to the ground by the force of the traitor's spring. The commander's head struck the

ground with a crash, and he lay still. A revolver barrel gleamed in the sunlight that filtered through the half-closed opening in the tent. But even as it was brought to bear Chester leaped forward.

With one strong hand he seized the traitor by the wrist, and deflected the revolver just as the traitor's hand pressed the trigger, and the bullet whistled harmlessly through the top of the tent.

The captain turned upon Chester with the fury of a madman, and so sudden and fierce was his attack that the lad was borne to the ground. But in spite of the fact that he was underneath, one hand still grasped the hand in which the spy held the revolver; and, try as he would, the latter was unable to break the boy's grip.

His teeth bared in a snarl, the traitor suddenly released his grip on the revolver, drew back and drove his fist at the lad's face. But if Captain Bassil was quick, Chester was quick also. With a rapid movement, he rolled over, the revolver still in his hand, and thus escaped the terrific blow aimed at him.

But before he could rise or bring the revolver to bear, the traitor was upon him again, and two hands seized him by the throat. In vain the lad tried to shake himself free, and he was slowly being choked into unconsciousness.

But with a last desperate effort, he succeeded in bringing the revolver, which he still held firmly, between him and his enemy, and pressed the trigger.

There was the sound of an explosion, and for a moment the grip on the boy's throat seemed to grow even tighter. But for a moment only, and then the hands relaxed, Chester heard a faint moan, and, drawing in great gasps of fresh air, the boy fell into unconsciousness, just as the flap to the tent was jerked hurriedly aside and many men rushed in.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE END OF THE CONSPIRACY.

When Chester opened his eyes to the world again he was propped up on General Givet's own bed, and the Belgian commander and a Belgian surgeon were leaning over him.

"Awake at last, eh?" said General Givet, with a smile, as Chester opened his lips to speak. "You had a narrow squeak, and no mistake. And to think that a young lad like you should be the means of saving my life!"

"You have indeed rendered a great service to Belgium," broke in the surgeon. "But how do you feel?"

"A little weak," replied Chester, with a faint smile. "But Captain Bassil? Where is the traitor?"

"Dead," was the Belgian commander's laconic response.

Chester shuddered involuntarily.

"Never mind," said the general; "it was his life or yours, and mine too, for that matter."

"But it makes a fellow feel awfully queer," said

Chester. "In battle it would have been different. But to shoot——"

He broke off and was silent.

"And the conspiracy?" he asked, after a brief pause. "You have taken steps to catch the Germans in their own trap?"

"I have," said the general grimly. "They will wish they had attempted to take Louvain in some other manner. Thinking us unprepared, they will be too confident. If they fall into our trap—and I am positive they will—they will be annihilated."

Chester was struck with a sudden idea.

"General," he said, "why can't we round up all the conspirators that are in the city?"

"In what way?" asked the commander.

Chester's reply was another question:

"Has your attempted assassination been kept a secret, or is it generally known?"

"It has been kept quiet," was the general's reply. "Were it generally known our coup might fail."

"Exactly as I thought," said Chester. "Now I am almost positive that the conspirators will gather for one more session before the German advance, if only to make sure that nothing has gone amiss. We can surround the house and capture them red-handed."

"An excellent idea!" exclaimed the general. "It

shall be acted upon. I will give orders to that effect immediately," and he turned to leave the tent.

But before he should step outside, Chester jumped out of bed and ran after him.

"And how about me, sir?" he demanded. "Am I not to be allowed to take part in the capture?"

"You!" exclaimed the general. "You are in no condition to move about. You shall stay here in bed."

"Please, general," pleaded Chester. "This is my discovery; it should be my capture, too."

The general stood wrapped in thought for some moments.

"So it should," he said at length, "and so it shall be, if you feel equal to the task."

"I am perfectly strong again," said Chester eagerly.

"So be it, then," replied General Givet. "How many of the conspirators did you say there are?"

"About twenty-five, I should judge."

"Good! I shall place one hundred men at your disposal, and leave entirely to you the manner in which you make the capture."

Chester was jubilant. So great was his eagerness to be at his work that he could hardly wait for his men to be selected. But at last everything was ready and it was time to start.

A short distance from the rendezvous of the conspirators, Chester divided his men into four groups of twenty-five each, so that they could approach from all directions at once.

With his men concealed from view, Chester bethought himself of the best manner to entice the conspirators out into the open. Finally he hit upon a plan. Calling three of his men, he walked with them to a spot directly in front of the conspirators' rendezvous. Here the four started a heated argument.

Suddenly there was the sound of a door opening, and a moment later the well-known voice of the chief of the conspirators exclaimed:

"It is the spy! Come, men, we must capture him. Shoot down the soldiers!"

A moment later and the entire number of masked conspirators were in the street. Then, at a signal from Chester, the Belgian troops sprang upon them.

There was the sound of a pistol shot, followed by many more, and a bullet whistled by Chester's ear. Two of the Belgian troopers fell, and several others groaned. It was plain that the conspirators, trapped as they were, would not give up without a fight.

"Fire!" cried Chester, and a death-dealing volley was poured into the little knot of men huddled to-

gether in the street, surrounded by Belgian soldiers.

The fighting became desperate. The conspirators were giving a good account of themselves, and here and there Belgian soldiers were falling.

Now the conspirators turned and made a dash toward their retreat. But five Belgian troopers sprang forward and barred the door, firing as they did so. The ranks of the conspirators were considerably thinner now, and to continue the fight would mean slaughter. This fact the chief recognized.

He hurled his revolver at his foes with a fierce imprecation, and then raised his hands above his head. His followers did the same.

"I surrender!" said the chief.

Chester went up to him.

"The tables are turned, I see," the chief greeted him. "Well, a man can't be on top all the time. But I was a fool not to have stayed and seen you properly shot."

"I am glad you didn't," was Chester's reply, "for I guess you would have made a good job of it. But enough of this. I am commanded to take you before General Givet."

Surrounded by Belgian troopers, the conspirators were marched to the headquarters of the commanding general. There a court-martial was called

to sit at once. Its work was brief. The prisoners were ordered taken out and shot as spies and traitors to Belgium.

Upon orders issued by General Givet, the Belgian troops soon began to move in accordance with the plan by which the Belgian leader hoped to trap the Germans. Their movements were such as to lead the German outposts to believe that they were retreating.

But instead of weakening his line where the Germans had planned to attack, General Givet strengthened it heavily. The troops were ordered to fall back a short distance, so that the German leader might believe the force in front of him had been sent to another part of the field to repel an attack that was believed imminent.

But the expected fall of Louvain by this piece of treachery was to prove a bitter disappointment to the German commander. Instead of the weak Belgian line he believed he was to encounter, he was sending his men against a force that had been heavily reinforced and that was determined to wipe out the insult.

As the Belgians gradually drew back, the Germans advanced, not too swiftly, so as to indicate an attack in force, but gradually and slowly. But continually larger and still larger bodies of Ger-

mans were sent forward, until suddenly it was apparent to General Givet that the time for the German surprise had come.

But when it did come the Belgian commander was ready. As the Teutons came forward in a headlong charge, the Belgians checked their backward movement and rushed forward.

A terrific volley greeted the charging Germans, and from the ambush, into which the enemy had been lured, the artillery opened upon them. They wavered slightly, but still they came on. But even as they sprang forward once more, the Belgian cavalry swooped down on them, dealing out death on every hand.

Stubbornly the Germans held their ground. Reinforcements were rushed to their aid, and the battle became general all along the line.

It was evident by this time that the German commander realized something had gone wrong with his plans; but now that the attack had been made he was not the man to give up without doing all in his power to go ahead. Now the Germans broke and began to retreat. With a wild yell, squadron after squadron of Belgian horsemen charged down upon the retreating Teutons.

Three times the German officers, bravely exposing themselves to the leaden hail of death, succeeded

in checking their straggling troops, and three times the Germans coolly reformed under a terrific artillery and rifle fire.

But it was no use. For now the Belgians began a concerted advance all along the line. The German charge had spent itself, and the Teutons gradually drew off.

But the retreat did not become a rout. The Germans fell back slowly, contesting every inch of the ground. The aim of the Belgian gunners and infantrymen was excellent, and the havoc wrought in the German lines was terrible. The field was strewn with dead, but over these the Belgian troops pushed on, pressing their advantage to the utmost.

Finally General Givet called a halt. The Germans were still retreating, but the Belgian commander did not feel that he could afford to pursue them farther. The danger of a surprise was over, and he did not wish to risk another battle, particularly as he was unable to see the necessity of extending his own lines.

Therefore, the Belgian troops fell back upon their line of defense and the battle was over.

Chester, upon the express command of General Givet, had not been allowed to take part in the battle. The Belgian commander had kept the lad close to him, occasionally dispatching him to some

near portion of the field with an order. And now that the fighting was over, General Givet announced that he would be pleased to have Chester dine with him.

But his work over and all his duties properly attended to, Chester bethought himself of his wounded chum. He was anxious to see Hal and relate what had happened and to make sure that his friend was being properly taken care of.

He reminded the general of the latter's promise to have Hal sent to Brussels, and received the commander's renewed assurances that he would not forget. Then he set out for the place where he had left Hal.

He stopped on the way, however, to see Edna Johnson, knowing that she would be interested in what had occurred since he last saw her and learning but that for her the Belgian army in Louvain might have suffered a terrible calamity.

Chester did not linger long with Edna, however, but after relating his experiences and a brief chat on other subjects, made his way to the house where he had left his wounded chum, to whom he gave a detailed account of all that he had done, and of the arrangements he had made for their reaching Brussels.

"I would have been all right here," protested Hal.

"Maybe you would," replied Chester, "but there is likely to be more fighting at any time, and you are in no condition to move about. You will be better off in Brussels."

"I guess you are right," said Hal.

"I know I am right. I understand there are no German troops between here and Brussels, so there will be no danger on the way."

Hal was silent for some moments, musing.

"We have had some fun here, haven't we, Chester?" he asked at length.

"We have," was the reply. "I wouldn't have missed it for the world."

"Nor I," returned Hal. "And, when I am well, we shall see more fighting. The war has just begun."

Four days later Chester and Hal arrived in Brussels, where Chester procured the services of a good physician for his friend, who had stood the trip remarkably well, and the physician, after an examination, announced that Hal would be able to get about in a short time.

"Quiet for a few days is all that is necessary," he declared.

And so Hal and Chester, comfortably housed in

the Belgian capital, sat down to await the time when they could again give their services to the allied armies.

And here properly ends the story of "The Boy Allies at Liège," though not the story of "The Boy Allies." Their subsequent adventures in the greatest war of all history will be found in a sequel, "The Boy Allies on the Firing Line; or Twelve Days' Battle on the Marne."

THE END.